

WHY WE LOVE

# **STAR WARS**

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Mango Publishing Group  
2850 Douglas Road, 2nd Floor  
Coral Gables, FL 33134 USA  
info@mango.bz

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Why We Love Star Wars: The Great Moments That Built a Galaxy Far, Far Away

Library of Congress Cataloging

ISBN: (print) 978-1-64250-000-4 (ebook) 978-1-64250-001-1

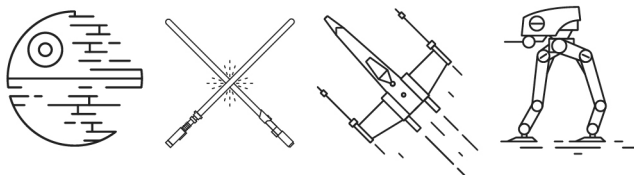
Library of Congress Control Number: 2019935677

BISAC category code: PER004030 PERFORMING ARTS / Film / History & Criticism

Printed in the United States of America

WHY WE LOVE  
**STAR  
WARS**

THE GREAT MOMENTS THAT  
BUILT A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY



KEN NAPZOK

## Praise for *Why We Love Star Wars*

“With his deep well of knowledge and heartfelt respect for the fandom, I can think of no one more qualified than Ken Napzok to connect readers to the love of Star Wars. If for no other reason, the fact that Ken has the ability, raw power, and sheer force of will to beat Sam Witwer in a Star Wars trivia contest simply terrifies me.”

—Jennifer Muro, television writer of *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny*

“Even though this book isn’t about the show *Get a Life*, I still learned a lot about *Star Trek*. Plus, Ken has dirt on me, so I felt this quote might appease him.”

—Nathan Hamill, artist, Teek enthusiast, star of *The Phantom Menace* and *The Last Jedi*

“*Why We Love Star Wars* will transport you right back to the bliss of watching Star Wars for the first time. It’s a reminder of the impact this fantastical world can have on any race, culture, or personal experience. It’ll make you fall in love with Star Wars all over again!”

—Andres Cabrera, producer/host of *The Meaning Of* podcast

“Ken Napzok is the ideal Star Wars fan. He understands the universe, characters, and themes and knows how to express them in entertaining and engaging ways. If anyone should be writing about why we love Star Wars, it’s Ken.”

—Alex Damon, creator of *Star Wars Explained*

“Ken Napzok, one of the leading thinkers in the Star Wars community, expertly reminds us all why we all fell in love with this storied franchise in the first place. In this oftentimes divisive moment of fandom, *Why We Love Star Wars* is an essential manifesto that aims to unite us, to bind us together by celebrating the moments that lead us into the galaxy far far away in the first place.”

—Van William, singer/songwriter

“Hosting the *Jedi Alliance* podcast with Ken Napzok for thirty glorious episodes forged some of my happiest Star Wars memories. He was the master to my padawan, the light to my saber, the hand wave to my ‘You don’t want to buy any death sticks.’ Ken was born to write this book and to shine a tractor beam of light on his limitless love for the franchise.”

—Maude Garrett, host/founder of GeekBomb and Whut fashion

“We write about what we know about. Ken knows Star Wars. His knowledge on the franchise is second to none. *Why We Love Star Wars* is an exceptionally fun read, returning us to the first memories and relationships we made with the film while preparing us to embrace what will surely be years of imaginative bliss in a galaxy far, far away.”

—Frankie Kazarian, professional wrestler with All Elite Wrestling (AEW)

“Because of Ken Napzok and this book, we can sound like we know what we’re talking about on our Star Wars talk show.”

—Stephen Ellis and Alex Backes, *Black Series Rebels*

“Reading this book, I discovered that Ken not only has the beard of Obi-Wan Kenobi but also the storytelling flair of C-3PO. He had me hanging on his every word like an Ewok. This is the Star Wars book I’ve been looking for.”

—Jamie Stangroom, director of *The Empire Strikes Door*

“The Force is ‘an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together.’ So is the power of Star Wars. Ken Napzok captures the essence of that power from Star Wars with every word. Ken binds us to our childhood, our feelings, and memories caused from the galaxy far far away with every word he writes. The Force is strong with Ken Napzok.”

—The “Greek God” Dimitrios Papadon, pro wrestler

“Ken Napzok is one of my favorite people to geek out about Star Wars with. Being a part of Jedi Council with him always ranks super high in this geek girl’s highlights list. I am so happy that now everyone can have Ken’s Star Wars wisdom in a collected intergalactically awesome book.”

—Tiffany “Smithlord” Smith, actress/host

“Ken Napzok weaves movie critique and personal stories seamlessly to illustrate the heart behind the hardware of Star Wars. Only a writer as skilled as Ken can inform, amuse, and (dare I say it?) emotionally touch on how much these movies mean to him and generations of fans.”

—Dan Farren, writer/producer, Story Salon

“Ken Napzok is an essential light in the Star Wars fan community and, through his writing, reinvigorates what connected us to the Force in the first place. *Why We Love Star Wars* uncovers the deeper meanings, hope, life lessons, and sometimes hilarity that come from a galaxy far, far away.”

—Ash Crossan, Porg Nation, *Entertainment Tonight*

“*Why We Love Star Wars* is THE book for the Star Wars fan...the new fan, the young fan, the old fan, even the fans who have yet to discover the magic. Ken Napzok reminds you, again, of the magic of Star Wars discovered as a kid and, later, put into practice as an adult. Its dissection of themes, its playful ability to expand on what you already know, and its capableness to teach you even more proves this is the quintessential book on Star Wars. It also reinforces one truth: Star Wars is for everyone.”

—Mark Reilly, writer/producer/host of *The Reilly Roundtable*

This book is dedicated to every young child, past, present, and future, who watches Star Wars and thinks, "I love this."

It is also dedicated to that kid in elementary school who bullied me for wearing a *Return of the Jedi* T-shirt. All is forgiven.

Oh...wait...one more...I also dedicate this book to Moff Tiaan Jerjerrod. I always felt you were unfairly blamed for the second Death Star not being completed on time.



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# FOREWORD: AN OLD HOPE

Joseph Scrimshaw

A thin brown stick, jutting out of a snow bank.

My gloved hand outstretched.

My eyes locked on the stick, willing it to move.

The stick refuses.

I concentrate harder, growling into the scarf wrapped around my face. “No,” I think. “That’s not how it works. The Force flows when you’re calm. At peace.”

I take a deep breath and raise my hand again, but a voice breaks my concentration.

It’s my mother with an important question. One she’s been asking with increasing frequency and concern: “Hey! You, uh, you know Star Wars isn’t real, right?”

Like countless other humans, I’ve been a huge fan of Star Wars from a very young age. I didn’t have the words to express it as a child, but Star Wars was always more than entertainment or escapism to me. I always wanted to make that stick move.

From my earliest memories, I fought to incorporate Star Wars into my life.

We had the board game Escape from Death Star. When my older brother wasn’t around, I turned to my teddy bear, Chocolate, who

graciously agreed to play it with me. He defeated me more times than not.

I devised bizarre and complex plots to act out with my three and three-quarters inch Star Wars action figures. Like when my Cloud Car Pilot, who I believe I named Rak Starflier, asked Hoth Outfit Princess Leia on a date while Han was frozen in carbonite. Leia, with great aplomb, rebuffed Rak and educated him on the concept of monogamy.

When I was a teenager, my father tried to teach me to play the drums. A skill I was unable to master until I remembered to breathe, relax, let go. I needed to stop obsessively counting every beat and trust in my instincts. I only learned to play when I unlearned what I had learned.

Over the years, I brought Star Wars into my life in so many different ways. Reading books, collecting action figures, playing video games, collecting more action figures, performing comedy shows about Star Wars, still collecting action figures and performing comedy shows about Star Wars action figures, specifically.

But still something was missing. Still, the stick did not fly into my hand.

Then a few years ago, I met Ken Napzok. I went on the show he co-hosted with Maude Garrett, *Jedi Alliance*, to share my appreciation of the Star Wars prequel trilogy and era.

Leading from that, Ken and I eventually co-created, along with Jennifer Landa, the ForceCenter podcast feed. Now, we spend hours and hours talking, laughing, and digging into the beating heart of Star Wars. The toys and the absurdity and the predictions, yes, but

also the characters, the artistry, the themes. The meaning behind the moments. The kind of ideas you'll read about in this very book.

And for the first time, the stick moved.

My mother had been understandably concerned that I couldn't tell the difference between reality and fantasy. But what I had always longed for is the chance to truly explore what this fantasy could tell me about reality.

Star Wars—with all its space wizards, bug-eyed monsters, and starships that travel at the speed of narrative need—is not running from the real world. It reflects the joys and challenges of reality and opens doors for interpreting it.

That kind of reflection is what I get from my long Star Wars conversations with Ken. And that's what you have in your hands or flowing into your earbuds right now. One long, fun, heartfelt conversation.

So, I encourage you to enjoy. Shout out when you agree with something! Whisper "hmmm" when you need to give something more thought. Jot down your own memories. Talk out loud to this book and imagine Ken listening to you with a playful, thoughtful sparkle in his eye. Your life will be better for it.

Because Star Wars is a fantasy. But the impact it can have on our lives is very real.

So, sit back, let go, reach out.

Make that stick move.

Make this book fly into your waiting hands.



# PROLOGUE

A long (enough) time ago in a small, coastal California town...

Spring, 1983. Ten kids, all aged between seven and eight, were in the middle of a slumber party. Laughter and horseplay were in full swing as the sugar rush from the birthday cake they had all just enjoyed had yet to give way to the sugar crash the host parents had been praying for from the first bites on. From the television emerged some now familiar sounds from a galaxy far, far away. Spaceships roared. Aliens laughed. Laser blasts exploded. It was a trailer for the next exciting chapter in the Star Wars saga, letting every kid (and the adults) in that room know that *Return of the Jedi* would be racing to theaters that May. Every single one of the kids stopped dead in their tracks. The rambunctious energy vanished in a flash. Star Wars had them.

Cue the opening theme to *Stranger Things*? Nope.

This really happened. It happened to me at my friend John's birthday. I remember the exact moment, the room lighting, the sleeping bag I was wrapped up in, and, above all else, I remember seeing Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight and friend of Captain Solo, dressed in all black, igniting his lightsaber high atop Jabba's sail barge, the *Khetanna*. Even when you consider the slower pacing of movie trailers in the 1980s, this trailer was full to the brim of the Star Wars imagery that would one day be a daily part of my life. Yet it was this one thing—Luke Skywalker hacking and slashing with his laser sword—that pulled me in. It stayed with me and, even now, I don't fully understand why. Han Solo would eventually become my "favorite" Star Wars character. I've always found myself more interested in the inner workings of the Rebellion against the Empire than in Jedi and their lore. It's not even my favorite Luke Skywalker moment. However, seven-year-old me was transfixed

and beyond intrigued by the image of this hero with a blade. (I'm sure there are some self-help books I can dive into as a means to explain it. I'll let you know the results another time.) What's even more entertaining now is that, in reality, the moment was actually fleeting. A quick search online will lead you to the actual trailer and watching it will reveal that Luke is on top of that sail barge, lightsaber ignited, for less than a second. Blink and, poof, it's gone. You're onto the next shot. But for years—years I tells ya—it was so burned into my brain that I was convinced Luke was there for most of the trailer (probably alongside comedian Sinbad as Shazaam and the Berenstain Bears). I actually kept searching for another trailer. One with the longer, sustained shot that I knew I had seen. But it wasn't there. All that remains is the brief glimpse of a Jedi Knight, a lightsaber, and the villains between him and safety. And that, if I may, makes it all the more impressive (most impressive) because that's all it took. One, brief moment. That was when Star Wars hooked me.

And the great part is...I wasn't alone. This happened to you as well. This happened to your friends. It happened to your uncle and your quiet next-door neighbor. It happened to your office buddy and the kid selling you a movie ticket. It happened to all of us. Maybe it was in 1977 when your jaw dropped as an Imperial Star Destroyer flew over your head for the first time. Perhaps it was in 1997 when George Lucas decided to rerelease his movies with all new additions and effects. This could have happened to you in 1999 when a wonderful teaser trailer announced that every legend has a beginning or maybe it was in 2015 when a more distinguished Han Solo proclaimed to his Wookiee copilot and us, "Chewie, we're home," and ushered in a new era of Star Wars stories.

We all have a moment that absolutely hooked us. While there are a lot of Star Wars moments to choose from amongst eleven theatrically released movies (for now!), two hit animated shows,

and countless books and comics, we seem to gravitate toward little moments just as much as the big themes. These **moments** become the very **reasons** we love Star Wars. The reasons we keep coming back. Yes, you could define a “reason” to love Star Wars as directly as “it makes me happy” or “it teaches you a basic morality at a young age.” However, those textbook “reasons” jump out of the screen and off the page through these moments. The moments are the reasons we love Star Wars.

Let’s go back to 1983 and that *Return of the Jedi* trailer. An entire generation of fans soaked in every image over the course of two glorious space-minutes. Amongst the X-wings, yelping Ewoks, and exploding Death Star, I locked onto that brief image of Luke Skywalker. That was a moment, but the reason it made me love Star Wars is that, in one action-packed beat among many, I gravitated to the bigger adventure at play. A gallant figure was in the throes of action, but he wasn’t striking out in anger. This hero in black, lightsaber in hand, was standing proud against evil forces. Standing strong between them and his friends. He was in control. It was a picture of calm strength amongst the chaos of the galaxy rolling out before us fans. It was the pose of a hero. A reason to love Star Wars emerged from that moment and I have been fascinated with those moments ever since.

It should be clearly stated, though, that this is not a definitive list.

It can’t be.

And it shouldn’t be.

For one, it’s can’t even be final. Thankfully, the Star Wars saga lives on. We as a fanbase thought the last of the Star Wars movies had arrived in 2005 with *Revenge of the Sith*. That was supposed to be it. George had completed his saga, at least in terms of the big

screen, and we were left with our memories, our collectibles, and the emerging digital media scene to analyze it forever. Sure, the excellent animated television series *The Clone Wars* launched with an uneven theatrically released movie that led us into the show—a show that did serve as an entry point into Star Wars for many fans and gave veteran fans more stories to chew on—but, for the most part, Star Wars was all wrapped up in a warm, nostalgic six-disc set. (Yes, with more variations and editions to come, but this isn't THAT book.) It all changed in 2012. George Lucas sold Lucasfilm to Disney and new movies soon followed.

I remain forever grateful. New Star Wars movies means a large swath of new Star Wars moments that create even more reasons to love the saga. You'll find a lot of those moments in the pages that follow, including moments from novels, comic books, animated TV shows, and video games. At the time of this writing, we're all still waiting for *Episode IX*, a new trilogy from Rian Johnson, live-action shows (*The Mandalorian* and one focused on Cassian Andor), and a proposed series of movies from the showrunners of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. The moments presented to you here represent a snapshot of fandom now. And, I guess, then. As Yoda said, "Always in motion, the future is." (Do you like Star Wars quotes? Oh, good, stand by for a lot of those.) And so it is with Star Wars itself. This can't be a definitive list because we're just not done consuming new Star Wars. Thankfully.

This also can't be a definitive list because one person is writing it. I certainly have lost nights and nights of sleep forming some kind of ranking here. (I've already changed my rankings three times since you started to read this book.) However, there was no scientific research that built the list you are about to read, no BuzzFeed polls to influence it, and we didn't go door-to-door to ask every fan what moments they wanted here. This is one fan's journey through the saga. Yet I'm not on a (Scarif) island alone here. One of the great things about celebrating Star Wars is that one's fandom is both incredibly unique and wonderfully communal. You may have

grown up in the American Midwest feeling like you were the only one that connected with the plight of Dak Ralter in *The Empire Strikes Back*, but, far across the globe, in Japan, England, or beyond, another fan felt the same way. Dak's words of "I feel like I could take on the Empire myself" resonated with them as well. You got there yourself. So did they. And now you are both connected. That's comforting. You have a large group of friends you have yet to even meet!

It can even be across time itself. Star Wars now expands across several different generations and will continue to do so. Star Wars is stronger when it is passed on to the fans that are coming up behind you. What inspired one fan in 1983 will organically inspire another in 2025. So, the moments that are about to roll out here started with me, but they're now yours. To be shared, discussed and, yes, quite possibly debated.

It should be known, though, that while the list found here could easily change and most definitely be added to, there is one permanent thing to be found here: joy.

I love Star Wars. I was a one-year-old baby swaddled in my mother's arms at a drive-in movie theater in 1977. My parents watched *Star Wars* that night and I certainly have no memory of that experience, but I *was* there. The franchise has been in my life the entire time. It hooked me in 1983 and despite a growing interest in other hobbies and pursuits, Star Wars remained strong in my heart. Baseball cards. Chasing an entertainment career. Romance. Not even Garbage Pail Kids—yeah, Garbage Pail Kids—could pull me away from Star Wars.

This does not mean that I believe everything in Star Wars is perfect. That there aren't wrinkles in the stories and characters that deserve questioning or a deeper look. This doesn't even mean that I don't

think one can poke fun at Star Wars. I do, actually. That's part of being a Star Wars fan. However, above it all, I love Star Wars. Unabashedly. When Joseph Scrimshaw, Jennifer Landa, and I launched the *ForceCenter* podcast feed in 2015, it was for the sole and very specific purpose of celebrating Star Wars. And that was continuing with a theme that fueled Maude Garrett's and my show *Jedi Alliance* in 2014. In 1983, I locked onto the image of a Jedi Knight high atop Jabba's sail barge with a lightsaber in hand. It transfixed me. It enraptured me. It inspired me. I fell in love with this silly little space saga at that moment. And I still love it. I always will. So, here now, together, you and I, let's discuss why we love Star Wars with one hundred moments that built a galaxy far, far away.

## A FINAL NOTE...

This is the point in the process I fear the most. You're really about to read this book and before you turn the page and actually take this journey with me, I just want you to know that I'm feeling really vulnerable right now. I'm not asking for sympathy. Not even understanding. I'm just letting you know the truth. I'm being very honest and raw. I've wanted to write a book like this for a long time and now it's here. You have it in your hands...or in your tablet...or in your ears with some really expensive voice-over talent reading it to you...and this is really happening.

Deep breath.

This is going to be a great experience for everyone AND apologies if I write in first person from time to time. (I was a stand-up comedian for years and we're just way too comfortable writing, performing, and complaining in the "I, Me, Mine" form.) I just want to say a few more things while I have your attention and you've seen me at my most vulnerable.

Here are technical notes on the moments that are the reasons behind why we love Star Wars:

First, this is a "ranking" but don't let that distract you from what you're about to read. These certainly build on each other and the moments listed later on do carry a little more weight, but I truly believe these reasons all add up to the greater point at hand: loving Star Wars. No one reason can exist without the other. It's like that one time Obi-Wan Kenobi told Boss Nass that the Gungans and people of Naboo are symbiotic life forms and they need each other.

Yeah. Yeah. That's exactly it. This book is **just like** the Gungans and the people of Naboo. Thanks, Obi-Wan.

Second, the moments, scenes, characters, sounds, music, and more are all based around the “new” canon of Star Wars. The canon that began in April 2014 when it was announced that Lucasfilm was starting over with a fresh slate of Star Wars stories beyond just the new movies coming down the pipeline. What was the vibrant and robust—and often confusing and, you know, what's the word, silly—expanded universe became Star Wars Legends. This was—and still is—considered by many to be controversial and, in some extreme cases, tragic.

I understand that. I respect that. I love the passion of Legends fans.

However, to be clear, this book is comprised of Star Wars moments drawn from the theatrically released movies, novels, and Marvel Comics released under this new canon banner, newer shows like *Star Wars Rebels*, *Star Wars Resistance*, and *Forces of Destiny*, and, of course, everybody's favorite animated program—*The Clone Wars*. While there are many things to be celebrated about Star Wars Legends (Palpatine's three-eyed son Triclops, Luuke the clone, and Chewie being crushed by a moon are **not** among those moments), this is not **THAT** book either.

Sorry.

Seriously.

Third, this book was written prior to the release of *Episode IX*, the live-action TV show *The Mandalorian*, or any future film projects, announced or rumored. So, if you happen to be reading this book **after** those projects came out and are wondering where is that one scene in which **FUTURE SPOILER HERE**, well, that's why.



The best part of this is that this means a second edition of this book will **have** to be written. Not published. No, what I'm saying is I will most likely just scribble some new moments into the margins of this book and if you connect with me on LinkedIn, I'll let you know what they are.

Fourth, what do you think first set off the feud between the Gungans and people of Naboo? I mean, for the most part the Gungans lived underwater and appeared to be on the other side of the world. That's why the "planet core" was the quickest way from Otoh Gunga to Theed, right? I kind of get the sense that the dry landers up on the planet's surface were being a little bit prickly in their distaste of the Gungans. I'm not absolving the Gungans of any wrongdoing. Sure, Boss Nass seems pretty affable after you put a peace orb in his hands, but prior to that he did seem to have an argumentative streak and Captain Tarpals had NO problem poking his own troops with electro prods. Eh, but if your next-door neighbors hated you for no reason, you might aggressively poke things with electro prods as well. Regardless of how it started, I'm really glad Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan were able to get that symbiotic point across.

Fifth, I am not affiliated with Lucasfilm or Disney. Though, I can tell you where to get the best hot chocolate in Disneyland. I am a professional broadcaster, podcaster, writer, and entertainer who has been entrenched in the professional Star Wars punditry game for a while now. I am not a critic. I am a professional appreciator, and this is one fan's journey through of a lifetime of loving Star Wars.

A really, really vulnerable fan.

May the Force be with you.

100

# THE BLOCKADE RUNNER BLASTER FIGHT

## HOW PEW PEW PEW BECAME A PLAYGROUND STANDARD

*Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

If you're talking about great Star Wars moments, you'd be hard pressed not to start where it all began: the opening moments of *A New Hope*. On May 25, 1977, unsuspecting movie fans settled into their seats (non-stadium, reserved seating without the ability to lounge back in the chairs. How did movie fans of the ancient times ever actually enjoy the movies they waited in line hours to see?) and were collectively blown away by the image of the Imperial Star Destroyer *Avenger* flying over their heads in hot pursuit of the soon-to-be-loved Princess Leia's Blockade Runner the *Tantive IV*. It was a sequence that literally changed cinema, fandom, and lives. Yes, actual lives were changed that day. What a moment. A true Hall of Fame Star Wars moment.

But let's talk about the moments right *after* that and the reason it provides to love Star Wars and one of the greatest gifts it gave fans: the sounds of blasters. Let's dive into the *Pew Pew Pew* of it all.

Sound designer Ben Burtt has as much to do with the success of the Star Wars franchise, particularly *A New Hope*, as any one because he

was able to create sound effect after sound effect after sound effect that stuck with you long after you left the theater. His sound design became the voice of Chewbacca, the breathing of Darth Vader, and the roar of the *Millennium Falcon*. Yes, the story, the characters, and the sequences that fans saw were important, but you cannot overlook the tremendous impact of the sounds you took home with you.

It was unintentionally brilliant marketing. In backyards and playgrounds everywhere, Star Wars was being played out by all these new fans. Whether it was with the Kenner figures (the ultimate marketing strategy) or something as simple as a stick for a lightsaber and your hands for a blaster, the *sounds* of Star Wars became one of the reasons you loved it.

*Pew.*

*Pew.*

*Pew.*

Now it's a meme. A beloved wink and a nod to the sounds you made as a young fan. A shared sound effect amongst fans. Pay close attention and you can even see Laura Dern as Admiral Holdo mouth "pew" as she fires a stun blast at Poe Dameron's mutinous cohorts in *The Last Jedi*. And it all began in that hallway.

Many were still processing the sensory overload of a Star Destroyer rumbling over their heads when the next sequence began. Worried Rebels, members of the Alderaanian security team, ran past some talking robots; one was gold and seemed really uptight, and took somewhat defensive positions against an unknown threat. A door starts to burn, their faces get tense, and blasters are raised.

Stormtroopers enter. The faceless "bad guys." And the fight is on. Sometime later fans would come to know (and study, memorize,

and brag about knowing) that the blasters were E-11s, standard-issue Imperial weapons, and the overwhelmed Rebels were wielding DH-17s. Cool details that flesh out the world, but all that matters in that moment were the sounds the blasters made. It was familiar, but it was clearly from out of this world. It felt like science fiction, yet it wasn't hokey or over the top. It was metallic, yet part of it floated through the ether. It was immediately that sound you *knew* these space guns would make.

Ben Burtt is a genius.

By now, how Burtt made these sounds is the stuff of Star Wars behind-the-scenes lore. While on a family vacation, Burtt, who always traveled with his trusty Nagra recorder, climbed up a hill in the Pocono Mountains to reach an old radio tower. Striking a rock against the cables supporting the tower, he created the sound that would fuel the fire of many a playground Star Wars reenactment. According to his late father, Ben knew right away that it was how an “imaginary laser gun ought to sound.”

Indeed, it was.

So, come for the dramatic tension, visual storytelling, and life-altering impact of the opening minutes of *A New Hope*, but stay for the sound effect that became the universal signpost for a battle amongst the stars.

*Pew Pew Pew.*

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## C-3PO RETURNS!

### A GOLDEN DROID, A RED ARM, AND THE COMEDY OF CHARACTER

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arnd

Director: J.J. Abrams

*The Force Awakens* was about returns just as much as debuts. The legacy of this film may well end up being all the *new* characters it brought to us like Kylo Ren, Finn, Poe Dameron, and Rey, but there is no mistaking that part of what was being presented to fans in December 2015 was a few more rides around the space block with your old friends. *The Force Awakens* was chock-full of new glimpses of our lifelong heroes.

Whether these first looks came at the very end, part of an emotional crescendo to the new story, or popped up along the way, it was nostalgic fun attending this reunion. Han Solo and the Mighty Chewbacca had the most celebrated of these returns (more on this later), but the others kept pace, mostly. Luke Skywalker waited around on a hill in one of the most daring story beats of the movie. General Leia showed up with a knowing smirk at her husband, in the middle of leading a resistance. Admiral Ackbar was too busy planning to wink at the camera. R2-D2 was taking a nap. And Nien Nunb, well, it was just nice knowing that our favorite Sullustan was back. Yet one return of a classic character actually struck a chord—

striking a pitch-perfect balance between string-tugging nostalgia and staying true to the character.

C-3PO was back!

*Episode VII* was really moving along by the time everyone's favorite, high-strung protocol droid showed up. It was almost a surprise. The audience was investing more and more in the adventures of our new heroes Rey and Finn when, suddenly, General Leia and her Resistance fighters show up. That itself is a great moment. The door to the Resistance transport opens to reveal Leia. Always a leader and not just a princess, she was now a general, the weight of the galaxy once again on her shoulders. Her expression is both weary and wry as her estranged husband stands before her. As fans, this is one of the moments we bought a ticket for. Leia...and Han... once again.

Then, like he's done so many times before, most notably on the *Millennium Falcon* while it was resting not-so-comfortably in the belly of the Exogorth in *The Empire Strikes Back*, C-3PO interrupts. He's once again robbed Han Solo of a moment alone with Leia and the moment earns its laughs. And C-3PO comedy is very much a reason to love Star Wars.

There are a lot of great Threepio moments to revel in and so much of that has be chocked up to the masterful performance of Anthony Daniels. Humor in Star Wars has and always will be important, but the humor around C-3PO always seems to work best. It's the comedy of character. Similar to how Han Solo being Han created some of the fandom's favorite jokes, bits, and declarations of love, the character of Threepio constantly earns laughs by being...well... himself.

The saga of Star Wars is fueled by serial adventure craziness. Something's always going wrong, something's blowing up, people are fighting, things are moving fast, and the opera in space opera is always moving forward. And in the middle of that is an anxiety-riddled droid just trying to hold on to one small piece of calm and adhere to his protocol programming. He just wants to do right by you...and for his princess. Yet flummoxed Threepio is best Threepio and time and time again some of the biggest laughs in Star Wars circle around him.

Does it always work? No. No it doesn't. The Threepio cameo in *Rogue One* is fun, but doesn't have time to breathe and, quite frankly, the comedy around him in *Attack of the Clones* veers way too far into wackiness and is a legendary stumbling block for fans looking to unilaterally love Star Wars. Even for Star Wars, a world in which giant space slugs rule criminal undergrounds and a pet dog inspired the best copilot in the galaxy, Threepio losing his head in the Petranaki Arena on Geonosis didn't seem real.

Which is why the grand return of C-3PO stands tall among his portfolio of laughs. He's excited to see Han Solo despite the years of verbal jabs he's received from the crusty smuggler. (Perhaps that's one of the added benefits of memory wipes.) He has no ego, so he's not going to assume Han remembers him. And because he's polite, he's going to give you the out of blaming his new red arm and wants to make sure Leia knows it's him. It would never occur to C-3PO that any of these feelings or assumptions are wrong, especially against the backdrop of two reunited lovers standing among the rubble of a freshly destroyed castle burning because of their son and his band of evil soldiers.

And we wouldn't want C-3PO, who *is* fluent in over six million forms of communication, any other way.

## **"PUNCH IT, CHEWIE!"**

### **HAN AND CHEWBACCA'S FIRST JUMP INTO A LARGER JOURNEY**

*Solo: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Jon Kasdan

Director: Ron Howard

*Solo: A Star Wars Story* is a love story.

Oh. Yes. But it is also so much more. *Solo* is a high-rolling serial adventure that soars among the stars while diving deep into themes like survival and freedom. It challenges its characters and viewers to clear up what you personally define each one to be. There are a lot of layers to this tale of how one of the greatest characters of all time got his start (and name). But make no mistake: This is a love story.

The love story isn't about Han Solo and Qi'ra. It's not between Han and his new crush, the *Millennium Falcon*. The tale of love told here is between Han Solo and Chewbacca. It's the beginning of their lifelong partnership and friendship. A connection that we know will pass the test of time. Han didn't know that at first as he was too busy basing his entire life around the girl he thought got away, Qi'ra. But it's definitely about him and Chewbacca. Even Qi'ra has to tell him that at one point. Han and Chewie truly love each other.

All of this feeds into one of the sweetest and most touching moments in the entire Star Wars saga albeit quick and simple. The moment when two friends set off for a lifetime of adventures as Han and Chewie jump to lightspeed for the first time as captain and first mate.



Han and Chewbacca's friendship was born out of circumstances beyond their control. They were literally chained together and have to work together to survive. Yet they are quickly forged together through the missions they are forced to take. Chewbacca has a chance to leave Han behind, but he decides to stay during the raid on Kessel after seeing Han's true nature and devotion to helping others. They're tribemates now. As they fly out of Numidian Prime, Han having just won the *Falcon* from Lando, the iconic duo has already been through a lot in a short amount of time, but a lot more is about to come their way.

This moment is certainly served by the audience being fully aware of this. It plays on that knowledge. From meeting Luke and Obi-Wan in Mos Eisley's Chalmun's Cantina to all the events of the Galactic Civil War and, yes, even Han's death, the audience has all of this burned into their souls by the time Han and Chewie are ready to make the jump. It's a tug on the nostalgia heart strings for sure, but it's an earned tug.

The levers click, the buttons tick, and Han even needs to flick a display to get it working. This is certainly the *Millennium Falcon* we all grew up daydreaming about. It's fast and sleek, but you sometimes wonder if it's going to work at all. Which is similar to the very dynamic of Han and Chewbacca. They are the best duo in the galaxy for sure (apologies to C-3PO and R2-D2) but you sometimes wonder *how* they work at all. And that is on display here as well, adding depth to a tiny moment. Han already has their next hairbrained scheme in mind and Chewie is dubious. Han asks when he's ever steered Chewbacca wrong. Chewie has several answers; however, he knows it won't matter. Han's smile means they're going on their next adventure. This is certainly the Han Solo and Chewbacca we all grew up rooting for.

Everything we know and love about these characters is swimming around our brains. It's as if the whole saga is flying right before our eyes. There are moments in this movie where their adventures do begin in a literal sense. Even a great moment when Chewbacca takes the copilot's seat for the first time. Yet, as they both reach their hands up and start to make the jump to lightspeed, we know that everything before this moment was the prologue. The funny story at the bar about how they first met. Now, as the stars start to blur and fade into streaks, Han Solo, dirty scumrat from the streets of Corellia, and Chewbacca, mighty son of the proud Wookiees of Kashyyyk, are not just jumping into lightspeed in the moment, they are becoming Han & Chewie forever.

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# **“LOCK S-FOILS INTO ATTACK POSITIONS”**

## **THE PROMOTION OF WEDGE ANTILLES AND THE FUN OF STAR WARS TRADITIONS**

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

The plucky Rebel Alliance had their ragtag backs up against the wall as thirty snub fighters launched from their no-longer-hidden base on Yavin 4. Their target was the Death Star and if they failed in this last-ditch mission—well—no more Rebels, pluck be damned. As the Rebellion's X-wings and Y-wings raced toward the Death Star, grizzled pilot Garven “Dave” Dreis, he of the awe-inspiring Red Leader call sign, barked an order: “Lock S-foils into attack position.”

And it was the coolest thing ever.

Yep. There is no need for any other fancy adjectives to describe it. It was just cool. The wings of the X-wings opened up to, you know, form an X. What was happening? What are S-foils? Why do you need them to attack? What. Is. Happening?!?! Rebel pilots and fans alike were tense. Fortunately, we all had Red Leader there to guide us through it all.

After barking the S-foils order, he steadied everyone as they passed through the Death Star's magnetic field and reminded them to put

up their front deflector shields. The young, fresh-faced Rebel pilots were pensive and weighed down by trepidation as opposed to the gruff calmness of Red Leader. The eyes of one such Rebel pilot bulged as he saw their target and blurted out, “Look at the size of that thing.”

It was Wedge Antilles. Red Two. A former Imperial flight school ace who had defected to the good guys. Skilled and confident, he was still lost in a sea of shock as he approached the Death Star. Of the Rebel pilots that flew into the fray that day, only three survived. One being the hero of the hour, Luke Skywalker. The other was Alderaanian Y-wing pilot Evaa Verlainne (something revealed to us years later in Marvel Comics’ five-issue *Princess Leia* book in 2015). The third was Wedge.

When Wedge showed up in *The Empire Strikes Back* as Rogue Three, a member of Luke’s Rogue Squadron, his place in Star Wars folklore was cemented. The Star Wars galaxy, even “in-story” had its heroes and celebrities: Luke was known far and wide for making the miracle shot that saved the day, Han Solo and Chewbacca had gone from outlaws to war heroes, and Princess Leia was royalty turned leader. Everyone knew them! Yet here was this mild-mannered wingman. A working man just doing his job and helping to save the galaxy. He and his gunner Wes Janson used a tow cable to take down an Imperial walker. He wasn’t just surviving this time around.

However, 1983’s *Return of the Jedi* was something special for Wedge fans. The Rebels, still ragtag and desperately trying to remain plucky, headed for what many believed to be the final confrontation with the Empire and their even larger second Death Star (no, really, look at the size of THAT thing) and Wedge wasn’t just part of that strike force—he was now Red Leader.

Wedge Antilles...the low-profile pilot without the glory and certainly no medals...was Red Leader. He had earned a promotion!

This small moment in an otherwise large-scale final act to the most sprawling story of the original trilogy can sneak past you if you're a casual fan. Lando, as Gold Leader, is leading the way and calls for all wings to report in. While Gray and Green leaders Horton Salm and Arvel Crynyd respectively checked in as well, the highlight was hearing Wedge Antilles proclaim first, "Red Leader standing by." Then he gets to calmly—not bark—command, "Lock S-foils into attack positions." The music swells and the Rebels head into a battle that goes to hell moments later. However, a smile will crack and a lump form in your throat when you stop and think about Wedge getting this honor.

Traditions in Star Wars are very much a "thing" and heartily consumed by the fandom. They are also the food that trivia contests feed on. That Wedge Antilles could—and would—rise in the command structure of the Rebel Alliance means he joined a time-honored tradition of Red Leaders that also includes Obi-Wan Kenobi in the Battle of Coruscant. It means the character we love has a newfound responsibility and has earned this prestige through his actions. Saying "Lock S-foils into attack position" means the character and actor we love (Denis Lawson<sup>1</sup>) is forever part of the recurring themes of the movie. The line is a battle cry in a way and it always means that our heroes are about to get into the thick of things. Whoever says the line again will now be compared to Wedge—one pilot among many who became the leader of the squad.

Wedge Antilles rising in the ranks and carrying on Star Wars traditions is inspiring, fulfilling, and—well—cool.

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, I know. Wedge was also played by Colin Higgins in the briefing room scene during *A New Hope* and David Ankrum provided the voice for the character later in the battle as well as voiced him in an uncredited cameo in 2016's *Rogue One*. Nathan Kress voiced him on *Star Wars Rebels*. However, make no mistake: Denis Lawson is Wedge Antilles to all of us.

## **“CHEWIE, WE’RE HOME”**

### **WHEN HAN SOLO WELCOMED US BACK**

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arnd

Director: J.J. Abrams

Thursday morning. April 16, 2015. A gas station in Primm, Nevada. Two travelers are on their way back from Las Vegas, the aura of sin and regret still hovering around them. One gets out to refill the gas tank. The other stares out the window, no thoughts, just the late nights of the trip catching up to him. Then. Suddenly. He remembers. It’s the first day of Star Wars Celebration Anaheim. The new teaser trailer for *The Force Awakens* is probably on the Internet.

He has friends at the convention and he himself will be there tomorrow. The trailer was going to be shown and, battling rising levels of jealousy, he pulls out his phone to find the video on YouTube. Service is bad out here, but the one minute and fifty-nine second video starts playing. It’s slow at first, taking its magnificent time to introduce us to the new faces of Rey, Finn, Poe Dameron, and Kylo Ren. Luke Skywalker’s dialogue from *Return of the Jedi* fades away as the music starts to swell, the action picks up, explosions rock the screen and send us into darkness...where we hear Han Solo say, “Chewie...” Fade up and Han Solo and Chewbacca are standing on the *Millennium Falcon*. He finishes, “... we’re home.”

And that is the story of how I, a full grown and somewhat functional adult, cried in Primm, Nevada, because of the words of Han Solo.

I was not alone. (Perhaps I was the only one in Prim, Nevada, crying that day. Well, crying because of Star Wars. Anyway...).

The moment is, of course, actually in *The Force Awakens* and it has meaning and merit in the story itself, but you cannot deny that this was the teaser trailer that ignited a fanbase. Just a few months prior, in the middle of a Thanksgiving holiday weekend, the first teaser trailer had exploded onto the scene. It was—and still is—a great teaser trailer. Yet, outside of seeing the *Millennium Falcon*, we still hadn't heard the old guard speak. New heroes, new droids, new villains (and their controversial new lightsabers) were fine, but what about the characters we grew up with? Was this going to work? Star Wars fans needed their fears eased. The second trailer presented us with that gift. Han Solo and Chewbacca were home...and so were we.

New Star Wars was done in 2012. One good animated TV show was hanging around and there were books and comics that many fans still enjoyed, but the experience of sitting down in a theater and watching new Star Wars was something of daydreams. That is, until 2012 and the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney. A new era was here. Speculation and its harder edged cousin, Expectation, took over the minds of even the most casual fans. What would this new Star Wars be like? What would it feel like? This was the moment we needed.

The composition of the shot echoed the very feeling and look of a promotional photo from the glory days in 1977. Chewbacca on the left with his bowcaster raised. Han on the right, smiling like the smuggler we grew up idolizing. The placement was intentional and a proclamation. The down time was no longer. The discussion and

rancor around the prequels were in the past. This was going to be the Star Wars you loved.

Interestingly enough, seeing the moment in the trailer was so invigorating that a major plot point was initially glossed over. If Han and Chewbacca were now home...where had they been?! It was a sign post of what was to come in this new era of Star Wars. Following the fall of the Empire, our heroes weren't going to be following the path we might have expected or wanted. Star Wars was introducing new heroes, yes, but it was about to challenge our old ones.

Han had run away. He and Chewbacca weren't even on the *Falcon*. They were returning to it. Within the context of the movie, we had learned that Han Solo, war hero (or was it infamous smuggler?) was cut adrift and running far away from the realistic responsibilities that had followed him, Leia, and Luke after toppling the Emperor and his minions. It was a surprisingly wonderful take on the saga. Star Wars was now saying that, yes, you are going to have great victories in life, but that doesn't stop the challenges. That doesn't keep you from making mistakes and being weighed down by regrets. Yet Han Solo and Chewbacca stepped back onto the *Millennium Falcon* and, though Han didn't fully understand it right then, they were back where they belonged. You can't—and don't—have to run forever. Han and Chewie were home, but it wasn't just them. We all were.



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## EWOK HUNT

### A STAR WARS HORROR STORY

*Star Wars Battlefront II*

Developers: EA DICE, Criterion Software,  
& Motive Studios

Oh. You don't like the Ewoks.

Got it.

Too cute? Too cuddly? A clear cash grab from George Lucas in 1983 as he intentionally targeted young Star Wars fans with Space Teddy Bears in the hopes that he'd squeeze an extra buck or two out of the toy sales?

Sure. I understand.

However, imagine this: You're on the forest moon of Endor, having just lost the biggest battle of your life. The imposing wilderness grows darker around you. What's left of your squad is out there, but you can't quite see them. You have a blaster on which a spotlight sits. However, that only works for sixty seconds at a time. The light goes out and then you hear it. A wooden horn sounds off in the distance, a proclamation of a war not yet finished. There is a rustling. A rhythmic pounding of soft-padded feet. You brace yourself, but you know you can't stop what's coming. You're a stormtrooper of the once mighty Empire—and you're being hunted by vicious, human eating creatures. The Hunt of the Ewoks

has begun. Sounds like pure horror, right? It is. It's one of the most terrifying moments in Star Wars and it happens to be in a video game.

The *Star Wars Battlefront* games first arrived on the scene in 2004 and 2005. A third installment was allegedly on the way before being infamously derailed. The series returned in 2015 with its own sequel in 2017. Without a doubt, the games have been met with a little bit of resistance from more experienced and passionate gamers. I guess it just wouldn't be Star Wars without a little bit of debate and hubbub circling around it. Yet what remains is a visually stunning game with some of the best looks at the locations of Star Wars, supplemented by some great, good ol' fashioned *Pew Pew* action. And then they unleashed the Ewoks on us.

At some point in the weeks, months, and years after *Return of the Jedi*, it was decided by a certain sub-section of fans that you couldn't like the Ewoks. Whether it was because of their aforementioned cuddly nature, their lack of blinking eyes, or maybe because that one Ewok says, "That guy's wise" after hearing the Golden God C-3PO speak, the Ewoks were pushed to the back of the room and placed in the roped off section called "silly Star Wars." This wasn't 1977 anymore and clearly *A New Hope* was awash in the gritty realism of the post-Vietnam era. Now it was 1983 and the Ewoks were really just space Care Bears complete with their own TV movies and a Saturday morning cartoon. Granted it took some big leaps to overlook the Vietnam War commentary from Lucas and the in-story truth that these cuddly space bears were planning on slicing up Han Solo for dinner, but, yes, the Ewoks were silly.

Thankfully, over the years there has been an Ewok renaissance and not just from a new, young generation of fans. A large part of this Ewokaisance has been driven by the fans that loved the Ewoks yet felt they had to hide that love in the shadows of an Endor tree.

No more! And the Ewok Hunt mode on *Battlefront II*, originally released in April 2018 as a temporary mode before becoming permanent later on, is the finest moment in the comeback of the Ewoks.

Honestly.

It also serves as a genre bend for Star Wars. Fans often wonder if there can ever be a Star Wars movie completely swimming in another genre. The easiest leap is a Western with *Solo: A Star Wars Story* having some elements of the genre throughout it. Realistically, though, it makes sense that Star Wars will always be... well...Star Wars first. Yet when you settle in to play Ewok Hunt for the first time, you realize quite plainly: The Ewoks are absolute monsters ripped straight out of a horror picture. This is a Star Wars horror story.

The sun can be out, and you can be playing the game among friends, but when your stormtrooper's gun light goes out, you are suddenly lost in the dark forest. You hear those footsteps and, as mentioned, that horn starts to blow. You've heard this horn before, of course. Those cute lil' Ewoks blew it moments before attacking the Empire and saving the Rebels in *Return of the Jedi*. Da-dada-daaaa! Yay! The silly Ewoks are here!

Except now you're hearing it rain down on you from the shadows. Your light won't reset, and you can't find your squad mates. The horn blows again. And suddenly Da-dada-daaaa isn't as cute and cuddly. It's not silly. It's a thesis statement—the Ewoks are angry, hyped, and, worse, hungry and they're going to see you well before you see them. It's frightening. And that's before they actually leap out of the trees and start poking you with sticks and killing you—KILLING YOU—with wisties.

Silly, silly Ewoks.

Then you die, and the fun begins. You get to **be** an Ewok. It's your turn to hunt. All your life as a *Return of the Jedi* fan has come to this moment. The game respawns you and you're now a mighty Ewok warrior high atop the walkways of Bright Tree Village, ready to defend your land from unwanted interlopers. You've been overlooked and tossed aside by these "ackie ata" for too long. You smell them. You hear them. You see them. Now it's your turn to play the Ewok battle horn and leap into the hunt. You're an Ewok now, fierce and proud, and there is nothing silly about that.

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## VADER'S CASTLE

### THE LAIR OF THE DARK LORD REVEALED

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

In those dark days without the Internet, when you didn't have the joy of hateful comments and aggressive debates, you only heard rumors. Tasty, tantalizing rumors. On the playground and in the neighborhoods, the behind-the-scenes stories of Star Wars were urban legends. Myths passed on like the stories of old. "Did you hear," one friend would boast. "The Ewoks were supposed to be Wookiees in *Return of the Jedi*. My uncle knew a guy who knew George Lucas and it's true." Murmurs of doubt and amazement would wash over you and your friends.

The next day, someone else would whisper, "I read in this magazine that George Lucas has six more Star Wars movies ready to be made." That seemed insanely improbable at the time but thinking about the possibilities was plain ol' wizard. You'd head home and sit at your desk, pretending to do your homework, yet all the while you'd be planning out your version of *Episode VII*. (See, that's the kind of pressure J.J. Abrams was under. We all started planning his movie in 1983.)

From my personal archives, I once tried to get into the action by convincing some of my friends that Lando Calrissian was Luke's

cousin and therefore had partial Force powers and could do things like call lightsabers to him. It worked for the length of exactly one lunchtime recess. However, the point remains, these rumors, half-facts, and, you know, bald-faced lies were the Internet chat rooms of the day.

One of the biggest myths floating around was that of Darth Vader having a castle. That's right, Darth Vader had his own pad, where he could stretch out his cyborg legs, take a load off, and dream about new ways to go forth and rule the galaxy. It was both intriguing and oddly out of place. The Empire was cold and sterile. Vader having a castle or lair seemed to fall too far into the super villain realm. As if to insinuate that Superman would be heading to Vader's castle for a final showdown. This couldn't have been true.

However, later on, concept art became a big interest of fans and the obsession with looking back and beyond at what might have been became just as much a part of Star Wars fandom as watching the movies themselves. Vader was "supposed" to have a castle in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Designs exist. Old drafts of screenplays emerged. Vader, the menacing face of evil in the galaxy, did, in fact, have a home. It wasn't until 2016's *Rogue One* that we finally got to see the lair of everyone's favorite Dark Lord.

On the surface and as it plays out within the movie, the reveal of Vader's castle carries its own weight and has relevance to the new stories of Star Wars. More and more is being learned as to why Darth Vader went to the site of his defeat at the hands of Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Revenge of the Sith* and set up shop. The Charles Soule-led Marvel Comics Darth Vader book that began in 2017 took a dark, disturbing dive into the hows and whys and it all makes great sense. Vader wants to be reminded of his defeat and rebirth. He wants to absolutely soak in the anger and loss he felt during his final

moments as Anakin Skywalker, someone he only refers to as the Jedi. It is sublime layering of an already legendary character.

Yet there is an additional wrinkle to the moment in *Rogue One*. When Director Orson Krennic's ship arrives on the surface of Mustafar, you immediately know what's happening. Yes, Krennic is about to have a business meeting with one of his many bosses like it's some sort of intergalactic scene from *Office Space*. But you're about to see what you never thought you would. The moment we see this castle for the first time, on screen, in an actual, real Star Wars movie has an added impact for those of us who spent many years with those old playground myths rolling around our Star Wars loving heads. It means it was true. Darth Vader has a castle.

And it is everything you dreamed it could be. It's everything the promise of the Ralph McQuarrie concept art contained. Darth Vader's castle is menacing and medieval; a supervillain lair on par with anything you'd find around Metropolis or Mordor. It is as cold and sterile as the Empire's icy grip on the galaxy. It has secrets and a dark purpose. In this castle, Vader is alone, save for his assistant Vanee and two red cloaked Imperial Guards, and he is angry. It is truly a lair for a Dark Lord.

## A SCOUNDREL'S SHRUG

### HAN SOLO CASUALLY DERAILS THE EMPIRE

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

There is an amazing amount of depth in Han Solo, and many of the reasons we love Star Wars are centered around the moments that make up his personal journey through the saga. You could enjoy the finest Corellian ale, pull up a chair in Fort Epso, and wax poetic about the lessons to be learned from the trials and myriad tribulations of Han.

And then sometimes he just really funny.

You can enjoy both aspects of this legendary character.

Han always has ideas and they're often from the seat of his pants. It's a miracle they work. Star Wars history has taught us that Han jumps in first, makes his own luck, and lives to tell about it. That's the whole "never tell me the odds" part of his character. It can be argued that his luck only truly ran out once, on that catwalk inside Starkiller Base as he stood before his son—ok, ok. Let's not get dark. Funny Han! Han is funny!

The Battle of Endor had taken a turn for the worse when Han got his crazy idea to climb into a captured AT-ST, pretend to be an Imperial (he had the experience), and \*hope\* the Imperials inside



the shield bunker would come on out. The Rebel fleet above them was being hammered between the very much *armed* and *operational* Death Star and the Emperor's beloved armada. The Rebel ground forces were scattered on the forest floor and only the surprising might and resolve of the Ewoks were keeping the good guys in the game. Han needed this to work.

It shouldn't have worked, though. It was too simple. Han simply put on an AT-ST pilot's helmet, covered his face with a transmitter, and said the battle was over and the Rebels were fleeing. In one of the bigger blunders on the Imperial's side, the commanding officer excitedly sent three squads to help and asked for the back door to the bunker to be opened. The very back door they had been vehemently blocking the Rebels from entering the *entire* battle. This officer just simply fell for it.

But we can dig into the foibles of the Empire another time.

The Imperials rushed out of the bunker to find Han and Chewie waiting on either side and a plethora (or is it bundle?) of Ewoks ready to seize them. In one of Han's best reactions, he just simply shrugs at the Imperials.

It's a shrug that says, "This shouldn't have worked." And he's right. The mighty Empire shouldn't have lost that day. They had the Rebels trapped in space. They had them routed on the ground. The Ewoks were fierce but would have eventually fallen back against the might of technology. The Empire should have been victorious, but one officer fell for a silly plan. Not because he was incapable. Not because he wasn't trained. Not just because he was outsmarted. No, he fell for the trick because he, like the Galactic Empire he served, was too blinded by the arrogant self-assurance that they were too big to fail. Nothing could topple them. Yet here they were, trapped by the natives they overlooked and the Rebels they never

respected. Han Solo's shrug says it all, "This shouldn't have worked, but we've won."

Actually, there's a lot to learn from a shrug.

# THE ROAR OF THE PORC

## IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EVIL, IT'S ALL FEATHERS ON DECK

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

There is a place for cute in Star Wars. The galaxy is full of mean monsters, cold-hearted villains, and sleek spaceships. It is also full of woklings, baby Ewoks that cutely cower in their mothers' arm when their God C-3PO gets angry. Its landscapes are dotted with affable Eopie and bulbous bottomed Shaak. Its cities burst with stray Loth-Cats and Tooka. Even the Death Star, the hub of evil and oppression in the galaxy, is crawling with squeaky lil' mouse droids. In a galaxy this big, cute is going to have its day.

Enter the porcs.

The seabird residents of Ahch-To had already made their mark on the Star Wars saga long before *The Last Jedi* even hit movie theaters. Quick shots from behind-the-scenes footage took the fandom by storm. A trailer appearance took the hype to the next level. Chewbacca was flying the *Millennium Falcon* and his copilot appeared to be one of these birds. Another behind-the-scenes image showed Chewie with what looked like a porc feather stuck to his mouth, leading to a bevy of jokes and memes about Chewie eating one of these plump pieces of poultry. YouTuber Jeremy Jahns

uttered the hashtag PorgNation and Entertainment Tonight's online personality Ash Crossan made that hashtag her passion and the movement was here.

It could be easy to write them off. If you don't like cuteness in your Star Wars, it's completely understandable. Admission into #PorgNation is not mandatory to appreciate *The Last Jedi* or even Star Wars as a whole. Yet one moment, the complete and in-context porg roar on the *Millennium Falcon*, is much, much more than a blast of cuteness. It was a declaration of war.

If you're going to defeat evil you need all hands on deck. And feathers, tails, and hooves. Every living creature has skin in the game. The porgs are no different. The Resistance was on its last legs when Rey and the Mighty Chewbacca arrived with the *Millennium Falcon* during the Battle of Crait. With a loud roar, the Wookiee Warrior announced his arrival and intentions to take out the First Order. He was not alone. The stowaway porg—sometimes referred to as Terbus, a name created by the father-sons podcast team at Tatooine Sons and jokingly approved by Rian Johnson as canon at a Q & A event—announced his arrival as well with a roar from the very depths of his porg soul. The battle against the First Order is not just about one side versus the other, it is about good standing against evil. Every living creature can get behind that. The Roar of the Porg was that call to action for everyone.

Look at it this way. Ol' Ben Kenobi once told a young farm boy that the Force is an energy field that surrounds all living things. Adding, "it binds the galaxy together." Yoda, while coaching that same farm boy, stated that life creates the Force and makes it grow. Yes, there is a lot to the nature of the cosmic and living Force, but when you focus on these two descriptions, it becomes clear that the Force isn't just here for species in the galaxy that speak basic and wear cool

outfits (though I'm all aboard for a cape-wearing Jedi porg). The Force is interested in ALL living things.

In *The Last Jedi*, those sly crystal fox-like Vulptices help the Resistance escape the dead-end cave on Crait and the Fathiers, those mighty beasts of burden enslaved on Canto Bight, take present and palpable joy in destroying the wretched city in which they are used as abused entertainment. The stowaway porg, proudly riding next to Chewbacca, even helps spot the Vulptices as they run out the back of the cave. This porg knows what is going on. He feels what is at stake. Oh, he doesn't know the names Kylo Ren and General Hux, but he is very aware that his new nest-mate Chewie is roaring into a fight against something that will threaten all existence. His roar—wonderfully long and sustained in the movie as opposed to the clipped and repeated roar in the trailer—is a scream of solidarity.

Cute does have a place in Star Wars...and often that place is on the battlefield.

# SABINE AND THE DARKSABER

## HOW PURPOSE AND LEGACY FOUND A YOUNG REBEL

*Star Wars Rebels*, Season 3, Episode 15,

“Trials of the Darksaber”

Writer: Dave Filoni

Director: Steward Lee

The hit animated show *Star Wars Rebels* grew up along with its core target audience. Airing on Disney XD from 2014 to 2018, the show was clearly for the children of earlier generations of fans and its early focus on young Ezra Bridger cemented that fact. Based on the early moments of the show, you would be hard pressed to believe that this series would eventually give us not only some of the *best* Star Wars moments but some of the deepest. Creator Dave Filoni, the cowboy hat-wearing legend among the fandom, clearly had a plan with *Star Wars Rebels*. As the characters began to grow up, bond with their fellow rebels, and get closer and closer to a full-on war against the Empire, the show matured as well. There were big themes and lessons and even bigger revelations. With each new bit of Star Wars lore, came a rich layer of character and story development.

Then the Darksaber arrived.

The Darksaber, a legendary lightsaber so black it's more the absence of color than anything, carries an important place in

the history of Star Wars...except we still don't know much about it. Which only adds to its mystique. So, when it returned in *Star Wars Rebels*, a lot of focus, prestige and importance were paid to it. It was a Star Wars canon junkies' dream. The great blade of Mandalore, featured as well in the beloved *Clone Wars* series, was back. However, who knew that behind that would be one of the Star Wars franchise's best lessons of personal power and responsibility? Sabine Wren, the lost daughter of Mandalore, was about to get a powerful lesson in legacy and purpose. The character that had yet to be fully explored was about to go from the galaxy's favorite spunky little sister to a layered, conflicted, and powerful leader. Sabine Wren was now wielding the Darksaber.

The specific moment that registers the deepest comes late in the episode "Trials of the Darksaber," found in season three of the show, but there is certainly a lead up to it. At quick glance, the Darksaber is a "cool" Star Wars toy. A one-of-a-kind lightsaber to be exact. But we quickly learn from Kanan Jarrus and Fenn Rau that the weapon comes with the legacy of leadership. Like a Star Wars version of Excalibur, whoever wields that Darksaber will reunite powerful Mandalorian clans and create an army that could change the tide of the burgeoning Rebellion. Sabine is the one to do it. These are high stakes for sure. Except there is one problem: Sabine Wren doesn't want the Darksaber.

There are several big lessons in this tale, and this is the first one. Sabine Wren has a higher calling and looks as though she is prepared to run away from it. After two and a half seasons with Sabine, we get the sense she's done this before. A defector from the Imperial Academy, she also is estranged from her family, Clan Wren of House Vizsla—home to the creator of the Darksaber Tarre Vizsla. She did something wrong. That's all we really knew at this point. So, it seems as though we have the timeless tale of someone

not ready to accept their greater purpose and learning to no longer run away from it. Deep enough, but there is a lot more buried here.

Kanan Jarrus, the now blind former Jedi Padawan who has been training Ezra, takes it upon himself to train the non-Force-sensitive Sabine in the ways of the Darksaber. (The sequence also sheds some light on the nature of the Force and its connection between the lightsaber itself and its user. There is truly so much to love here!) She's already a skilled fighter, but it's not working. All of this is a challenge to Kanan, but the focus here is on Sabine Wren—as it should be. Sabine has lived a life with no one from her own family standing by her following the events of her past. Her independent nature, forever valuable and a key dynamic to the growing Rebellion, is also a shield to her deepest pain—a pain Hera Syndulla sees and identifies with. Sabine is racked with guilt, shame, and fear, but above it all, no one from her family believed her and supported her. She's alone...and has been for a while.

All this leads up to the key moment in the story. After walking away (again) from the challenge, Sabine returns, ready to face it all. Kanan, patiently waiting, hands her the Darksaber and, for the first time, Sabine accepts it. Not just the weapon itself, but everything it represents on the surface—the legacy and purpose—and everything it represents to her: facing off with her family and her past.

And so begins an intense training session where the teacher, learning to instruct like he never thought he could, spars with the student fighting herself. With each strike of his blade, Kanan digs deeper and deeper into Sabine's soul. She's fighting back, but it's defensive, restrained. The walls are up. Kanan presses harder and harder until she breaks. For the first time, Sabine is honest and her emotional breakdown launches this show well beyond the “for kids” realm. It's raw and real.



Sabine Wren made a colossal mistake, accidentally creating weapons of mass destruction for the Empire that led to the defeat and enslavement of her Mandalorian people, and she left for them. To protect them. The cost was her own family as her father, mother, and brother, and entire clan did not stand with her. In a sense, she ran away, but the truth is she was abandoned, and she doesn't want to face them again. This is why Sabine could not even comprehend taking the Darksaber and leading her people. It wasn't just about responsibility. And, in truth, she doesn't know if she even wants to lead them. Kanan assures her that this family—her rebel family—will stand by her no matter what she decides to do (something that is important later on when Sabine passes the Darksaber over to Bo-Katan Kryze).

Through the story of a treasured piece of Star Wars lore comes one of the deepest looks at the inner workings of family, confronting your biggest mistakes, and facing down the very core of your fears. All of which leads to true healing. *Star Wars Rebels* may have started out as a fun romp through the early days of the Rebellion through the eyes of a plucky orphan and his new friends, but it matured into so much more. It turned that corner when Sabine Wren went through the trials of the Darksaber.

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## **CASSIAN ANDOR: SEPARATIST BLOOD**

### **IT TAKES ALL KINDS TO REBEL**

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* novelization

Author: Alexander Freed

For most of your Star Wars fandom, you roam around the landscape, thinking that the beings that make up the Rebels are the clear-cut good guys. And, well, don't worry, they are. This is a war of good versus evil, after all. *A New Hope* makes that pretty clear. However, as the years—and franchise—have rolled on, a new, more realistic picture of the people behind the Rebellion versus the Empire has emerged. And it's wonderfully **not** as clean as first thought.

When we first meet Rebel spy Cassian Andor, he's sneaking around an Imperial-occupied city on the Rings of Kafrene. Cool. Yeah. That's what you'd expect of a Rebel spy named Cassian Andor. Then. Boom. (Or rather *Pew Pew Pew*.) He does something you would never expect: He sends a laser blast into the back of his informant Tivik and kills him. A Rebel just shot someone in the back! That's not something you would have seen in *A New Hope*. The waters of this Rebel river are now murky. The Rebellion against the Empire wasn't **just** like-minded politicians, good-hearted smugglers, and daydreaming moisture farmers. It was built with species from all parts of the galaxy and they brought with them

different beliefs, strategies, and histories. A much more interesting and dynamic makeup of the Rebellion, which was why it was pretty damn cool (and definitely) surprising to learn that Cassian Andor, Rebel spy, was from a family of Separatists.

As it plays out on screen in *Rogue One*, Diego Luna's Cassian Andor is conflicted and haunted by everything in his past. There is no doubt he believes in the cause. Andor is a rebel to the core. Nonetheless, his actions have weighed heavily on his soul and he wonders if it is all worth it. Additionally, he is also **very** standoffish with his new allies Chirrut Imwe and Baze Malbus. Their belief in and history with the Force, particularly Chirrut's, seem to rub this Rebel spy the wrong way; which is weird because don't the Rebels believe in the Force? Rebel leader General Jan Dodonna was the first onscreen character to say, "May the Force be with you." Not Obi-Wan Kenobi. Not Luke Skywalker. It was a Rebel. They're the good team. The Force likes them. They like the Force, right? Yet, here was Cassian Andor, standing out from under the protective umbrella of the Force.

The answer came in the *Rogue One* novelization by Alexander Freed when we the reader had the benefit of getting inside the mind of Cassian Andor. It's stated plainly on page eighty-eight: Cassian Andor was raised by a family loyal to the Separatists. These were the people and planets that made up the Confederacy of Independent Systems and they stood against the Republic. In other words, the "bad guys" from the Star Wars prequels. Cassian Andor grew up fighting the Jedi and their clone armies.

It was a revelation worthy of putting down the book and ruminating on. It adds these delectable layers to the Rebels **and** it makes you look even closer at the events, major players, and points of view of the Clone Wars era. The Republic **became** the Empire. Perhaps Padmé was right when she asked Anakin whether he ever

considered that they were fighting on the wrong side. You have to wonder about the true intentions of Count Dooku breaking away from the Jedi Order and leading the Separatists movement. Was it **just** about becoming a Sith Lord? Deep questions that make going back to watch and read these lil' Star Wars stories that much more fun.

Cassian Andor being raised a Separatist fuels the fires of what makes him a rebel. He was a child when he became part of an Outer Rim insurrection cell, a soldier at six years old. His father died resisting. He watched as the Republic stamped out the Separatists and tightened its grip on the galaxy under a new name. He joined a new cause and had to learn to fight alongside people that fought against his family. Just as they had to learn to fight with him. Everyone—from Saw Gerrera to Mon Mothma to General Draven to Princess Leia—had a different idea of how to rebel against the Empire. Yet they all had to learn to work together in pursuit of the same goal. Cassian Andor is the face of this new Rebellion: Different paths leading to a shared goal: freedom for the galaxy.

Now you can pick up the book and finish reading about those plucky Rebels.

## GRIMACE IN PEACE

### THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN CANADY

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

In the waning days of the Galactic Empire's reign, survivors and leaders hand-selected by Palpatine himself headed out into the shadows of the Unknown Regions to reform, regroup, and rethink how best to rule the galaxy again. As Grand Admiral Rae Sloane said in the final moments of Chuck Wendig's novel *Aftermath: Empire's End*, "It's time to start over. That is our first order. To begin again. And to get it right, this time." The Empire was no more, but the First Order was born that day.

A lot happened between then and the events that led up to *The Force Awakens*. The First Order grew for sure. It made itself into a looming threat to the New Republic and then struck out in full force, scarring the galaxy forever. However, the First Order is a combustible mix of the old and the new. Leaders like the frenetic fascist General Armitage Hux and emotionally unchained Kylo Ren are new to the party; leaders like Captain Moden Canady have been around since the glory days.

When the First Order dreadnought the *Fulminatrix* arrives in all its splendor to finish off the pitiful Resistance forces in the opening minutes of *The Last Jedi*, Captain Canady is on the bridge with the

glowering presence of a man who hates working for his younger and less experienced boss. Canady is surrounded by rookies. You get the sense that he spends his evenings staring into a bottle of space booze, reminiscing about the days when oppressing the galaxy was done right by tougher people. He's not wrong. Sure, sure...let's be clear...the First Order **are** the bad guys, but there is something interesting about the ranks of the First Order being filled in part by an older group at odds with the inexperienced, one-note upstarts they've been forced to work amongst.

Every fiber of Captain Canady's being, excellently portrayed by Mark Lewis Jones, is that of a more skilled leader resigned to his position and, eventual, fate. His grimace seconds before he dies is one of the finest character moments in all of Star Wars. It's a galactic case of the Mondays.

In the heat of the moment, you can almost forgive yourself for rooting for a man who has spent his entire career on the wrong side of the fight. Moden Canady was a proud and dutiful commander of a Star Destroyer during the Galactic Civil War. He kept his allegiance to the core principles of the Empire and transferred his loyalty to the rising First Order. You have to think that he understood where the likes of Rae Sloane and, General Hux's father, Brendol Hux were coming from, and where they wanted to go. A chance to rebuild the Empire and serve again? Check and check. Unfortunately for Canady, it was not as easy as that.

Canady's final moments in life were a poignant insight into the true state of the First Order and a biting comment on the evil buried within. It was mindless, chaotic, and without honor. (Yes, again, the Empire was nefarious. The bad guys for sure, but, to many in the working class ranks of the system, it was an honorable career.) Canady wasn't just an old cranky guy tired of working, who felt he was surrounded by eejits. He **was** surrounded by them.

The younger ranks of the First Order were arrogant, ineffectual, and convinced of their own superiority with no merit. They were evil for evil's sake and their leaders were driven by fear. In *The Force Awakens*, General Hux rages and postulates. He's so over the top, it almost devolves into parody. But as *The Last Jedi* opens up and Captain Canady watches the advantage of a perfectly good surprise attack vanish at the hands of one puny fighter, we learn along with him, that the First Order is all rage and no substance. Which makes them even more dangerous: they don't even comprehend boundaries to their actions. To someone like Canady, removing the Resistance might just mean the First Order can settle into a nice, comfortable place of control over the galaxy. What he feels is needed is structure to a galaxy with no true center any more. General Hux won't stop with the Resistance. His fear will lead to the world being burned down.

So, Captain Canady's glares, grunts, and muttered rebukes play out in several directions. On the surface, it's highly entertaining office politics that stretch beyond a galaxy far, far away and land in your job's conference room. But on a deeper level, it's a look into a rising power that has no checks and balances. As the last Resistance bomber races toward its target, Canady's precious dreadnaught, Canady screams for it to be destroyed but it's less of a command and more of a hope. Canady is doomed, and he knows it. Years of proud service, experience, and knowledge mean nothing. As the fires race toward him, the look on his face displays a bevy of emotions but settles on one thought: "Of course, I'm about to die. I work for idiots." Grimace in peace, Captain Moden Canady. You deserve it.

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## DOING TALKING

### ROSE, FINN, AND REDEFINING THE HERO

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

One was a freshly minted hero of the Resistance who had never wanted to be one. The other wanted to believe in heroes when she was about to become one herself. The journey of Finn and Rose is really about finding yourself and becoming something bigger than you thought you could be. It's about stepping out beyond your self-imposed limitations and finding the strength you believed you lacked. It's about being forged by fire and emerging as something new. And this big journey begins in the most wonderfully small way. Finn and Rose meet as a hero running away and an awkward flight tech crying alone. From there, they become the new core of the modern rebellion.

Stormtrooper FN-2187 didn't become Finn of the Resistance because he wanted to save the galaxy. Initially, Finn wanted to save himself. Once a prized cadet of the First Order, he showed early signs of being uncomfortable with the idea of being a faceless blunt weapon of the organization. (Perhaps that led to his time as a janitor. Afraid to shoot? Clean a latrine!) His first taste of battle left him shattered and unable to carry out his duties. Finn's half-cocked crazy plan to spring Poe Dameron from the Star Destroyer *Finalizer* was based



on fear of being found out, not on some overwhelming change in morals. He was running away.

It was while running away that Finn made his connection with Rey, his second, more powerful motivation. While his devotion to Rey was admirable and the key step in moving him closer to the better person he would eventually become, Finn's desires remained selfish and reckless. His plan to return to Starkiller Base and knowledge of how to take it down isn't a lie. In fact, it works, but the hail mary pass to win the game puts every member of the Resistance at risk and, as Han points out, the entire galaxy as well. And that hadn't occurred to Finn. They'd just wave their hands around and use the Force...or something. All that mattered to him was saving Rey. When he meets Rose, Finn still has a one-track mind. "Where's Rey?" he demands to know, and he is prepared to leave the Resistance...again.

Rose Tico was always about others. She and her sister Paige joined up to fight the First Order because they experienced firsthand what they did to their planet and people. Though tremendously smart and technically inclined, Rose was a worker bee. She accepted a smaller role, quietly serving the greater good in her drab engineer garb while looking up to others. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, mind you, just that Rose was meant for more.

Her sister, serving in a similar fashion as a simple bomber gunner, died serving others. They **both** looked up to Finn. His accomplishments, though true and important, had grown beyond the reality of what he was. So, when lil' Rose Tico stumbles through her introduction to Finn, engagingly proclaiming that "doing talking" is tough for her, we're introduced to a brand-new kind of Star Wars hero: the "every person" capable of changing the course of history.

The meeting of Rose and Finn is a deliciously layered moment. Finn is immediately faced with the raw emotions of someone grieving. Rose has lost her sister. That itself scares Finn almost as much as the arrival of Snoke's First Order flagship. (By the way, in his haste to rescue Rey and leave, Finn fails to alert the Resistance of the *Supremacy* and other First Order toys. That's how focused on **himself** he is.) Finn knows he's a fraud and fears being found out. Hell, even the late, great Han Solo told him that he would be found out back on Takodana. Rose is immediately faced with the inspirational image of a true hero. In a short amount of time, the actions of Finn have already been packaged up as myth within the ranks of the Resistance. Finn—or **the** Finn as Rose says—helps Rose make sense of Paige's death. At least, she thinks so in the first few moments. But never meet your heroes! Rose quickly sees that true image of a frightened man.

Finn is found out and Rose doesn't hesitate to do her duties. In a moment, the idea of hero has been redefined for Rose Tico...and for us as well. Finn, thankfully, will soon learn as well. Rose keeps him from deserting, altering both of their lives in the process. It's a small beginning. Doing talking might not be Rose's strength, but fortunately she and Finn are meant for so much more.

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## LEIA GETS HER DRESS

### THE SMALL DETAILS AND BIG LESSONS OF FORCES OF DESTINY

*Star Wars Forces of Destiny*, Season 1, Episode 3, “Ewok Escape”

Writer: Jennifer Muro

In *Return of the Jedi*, Princess Leia is separated from the Endor strike team, finds a new friend in Wicket, and reappears as the Ewoks’ apparent guest of honor in Bright Tree Village, wearing a fancy new dress. Did the Ewoks make it for her? Did they just have a collection of dresses in a back hut? Did she request the dress? How did Princess Leia go from Combat Poncho Ready to Forest Dress Sheik? It was a question many had been asking since 1983 and we finally got the answer. It wasn’t on the big screen, in a novel, or even a comic book. The answer...as well as several other little details and fun canon morsels...arrived in the 2017 YouTube animated series *Force of Destiny*.

Written initially by Jennifer Muro and later Nicole Dubuc, the series has the daunting duty of being directly aimed at a younger generation of Star Wars fans—and in many cases completely **new** younger fans—while also attempting to satisfy the old guard in this current era of mining every corner of Star Wars content for canon implications and saga-expanding moments while focusing on the female characters in Star Wars.

I wouldn’t have been brave enough to try that.

Yet Jennifer Muro came out swinging with the first eight episodes. Seamlessly working in charming, offbeat fun stories with traditionally big Star Wars morality lessons, *Forces of Destiny* is a bite-sized, delightful thrill. Combine this with the Hasbro line of action dolls and it's the perfect recipe for Star Wars made for kids.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ADULTS? CAN ADULTS WATCH IT?

Calm down.

Yes. Yes, they can.

To date, the series has presented fans intriguing moments built around popular characters in previously never before seen—or even thought of—team-ups with other popular characters. It also led to a reunion of *Clone Wars* characters and voices fans thought they'd never see again. (This was *before* the celebrated return of *The Clone Wars* series.) And it even gave us Mark Hamill voicing Luke Skywalker in a tale set during the original trilogy! All impressive points on the resume of this micro series, but you might have easily overlooked all of this. Written this whole series off as kid's stuff. But in every moment of this series, the DNA of Star Wars can be found. *Forces of Destiny* episodes aren't love letters to Star Wars—they're little postcards.

The series succeeds best when it has fun with the little corners of Star Wars where the saga doesn't have time to slow down and provide us with those tiny details we crave. This is embodied best by the revelation of Leia's dress. Was this a giant, perplexing issue for Star Wars fans? No. Not at all. However, it *was* discussed. People wondered. People joked about it. People wanted answers.

And answers they received! Leia and Wicket are leaving their *Return of the Jedi* interaction with the biker scouts when they run into some

evil agents of the Empire, dreaded stormtroopers, harassing two other Ewoks. Without hesitation, Wicket jumps in to save the day. While the Empire is knee-deep in overlooking the might and threat of the Ewoks, Leia immediately sees an ally. She helps save the Ewoks and is presented with a gift. The dress we've known, loved, and questioned since 1983. She accepts the gift, asks for a spear, and cements a partnership that would eventually topple the Empire.

It's perfect.

The series goes on to teach bigger themes for sure. Ahsoka learns the value of individuality from Yoda, something that would factor into her leaving the Jedi Order. Padmé shows her diplomatic acumen in solving problems. Jyn Erso, a criminal on the run, displays her good-natured heart in helping a young stranger. Time and time again, *Forces of Destiny* builds wonderful moments out of the saga's core DNA and it constantly reminds fans the importance of passing on the love of Star Wars to the next generation. Small lessons and big reminders for everyone with the gift of answers for a generation in the making.

# JAR JAR THE CLOWN

## THE EPILOGUE OF JAR JAR BINKS

*Empire's End: Aftermath*

Author: Chuck Wendig

Jar Jar Binks deserves a moment in this book.

He really does.

Yes, one cannot deny the truth of the situation. We are all aware of the history of this character, the backlash against it, and the emotional and psychological toll it took on Ahmed Best, the charismatic artist and performer that portrayed him. Jar Jar Binks incites opinions. Understandably. However, the character exists. He is part of the Star Wars story. And he has fans.

Many watching *The Phantom Menace* in 1999 did not connect with Jar Jar Binks and they never will. Their arms are figuratively and literally crossed. The line is drawn. Yet George Lucas will say—until he is as blue in the face as his *Revenge of the Sith* character Baron Papanoida—that he specifically created Jar Jar Binks with kids in mind and it is those young fans, now stretching across different Star Wars generations, that connect with Jar Jar. The character continues to reach these fans and the ones that grew up with him from 1999 on still have a soft spot for him. Yep, they grow up and start to connect with other characters and movies, but, much like the Ewoks of *Return of the Jedi*, Jar Jar was part of their entry point into the saga.

So, yes, Jar Jar Binks is a reason to love Star Wars.

Author Chuck Wendig made many strong and bold choices in his *Aftermath* trilogy of novels set in the days and months right after the Rebels' victory on Endor. He painted a realistic picture of the galaxy following a vicious war that toppled a ruling government. The war truly did not end when the Ewoks danced and sang with our heroes. He assured the diversity of the galaxy, and therefore this real-world franchise, was wider than it was before he put pen to paper. He dealt with tough, nuanced issues. He made a battle droid a lovable character. (More on THAT later.) However, beyond all that, the bravest thing Chuck Wendig did was bring Jar Jar Binks into this modern Star Wars era in the final book of the trilogy, *Aftermath: Empire's End*.

The epilogue of Jar Jar Binks, found in one of the trilogy's trademark interludes, is absolutely one of the most heart-wrenching and touching moments in Star Wars. We go to Theed, the capital of Naboo, the planet on which we all first met Jar Jar and meet Mapo, a ten-year-old refugee of the Galactic Civil War. His parents died because of the Empire, but the theme is clear: the Rebel victory had many unforeseen costs. Mapo is now a maimed orphan and, at ten, one of the "older" refugees that gather in the city and unlikely to get adopted like the others.

Mapo is taken to a Gungan referred to as the clown, but he identifies himself as Jar Jar and the two quickly connect over the shared feeling of abandonment and neglect from everyone and everything. No one talks to Mapo and no one talks to Jar Jar. They both feel that they don't belong anywhere.

Jar Jar Binks was a war hero heralded by his people for bridging the divide with Naboo, helping to win a war, and later proudly serving his planet alongside Padmé Amidala on the capital planet

of Coruscant. But he fell prey to the machinations of a Sith Lord and proposed the motion to give Chancellor Palpatine emergency powers, unwillingly paving the path for the Clone War and the rise of the Emperor himself. (Almost as if George was saying, “Fine. You hate him? Now you can blame him for everything.”) Following the end of that war and the rise of Palpatine’s Empire, Jar Jar Binks was banished by his own people and forgotten by any friend he may have had left. He had no place left in the galaxy. He was a casualty as well, so Jar Jar turned his attention to the only people that would talk to him and spent his days entertaining the young refugees, bringing joy to the kids around him.

Think about it: Jar Jar Binks has been shunned by the people he once thought would always love him and now finds his sole purpose in life entertaining the only people that value his presence: children. It’s not just a sly meta comment on the character and the story. It’s a mirror placed in front of the fandom itself.

It’s nothing short of breathtaking.

Time changes perspectives and it calms down the inflamed passions of (most) fans. The epilogue of Jar Jar Binks is a fitting punctuation point to the journey of the character (assuming we don’t hear more) and it adds an unexpected depth, thankfully. Ahmed Best deserves this mature, layered look at the character he brought groundbreaking life to. Just like the character, Best, one of the trailblazers of performance capture, was on the receiving end of scorn and a fandom-sized shunning. In 2018, he openly spoke of the depression and suicidal struggle this brought to his life. This moment doesn’t necessarily heal that, but it beautifully and thoughtfully reminds us all to look again at Jar Jar Binks and his true value in the Star Wars saga.

And that is very much okie day.



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# APHRA ARRIVES

## DOCTOR APHRA AND THE WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

Marvel's *Star Wars: Darth Vader*: Book I, Issue III

Writer: Kieron Gillen

Artist: Salvador Larroca

In May 2015, Kieron Gillen's Marvel Comics series *Star Wars: Darth Vader* had already begun to take the Dark Lord of the Sith on his own personal journey to discover the truth about the young Force-sensitive Rebel that blew up the Death Star. He was doing this on his own, hidden from the watchful gaze of his master, Emperor Palpatine, so he immediately formed alliances with some shady characters, old and new. Boba Fett was on board, as was disgraced Wookiee bounty hunter Black Krrsantan. However, in issue three, a seemingly innocuous meeting with a morally ambiguous archeologist launched the journey of a new fan favorite. Doctor Aphra had arrived.

Doctor Chelli Lona Aphra may have been introduced as a supporting character but her arrival left an impression. She was undeniably whip-smart and full of youthful energy and defiance. Vader had arrived to save her from some trouble, but Aphra was still cracking jokes with the Dark Lord. Taking him into a fresh, new line of conversation. It was as if Vader had met Ahsoka all over again, but the edges of this partnership were going to be darker. She

was nervously respectful of Vader, a self-confessed fan even, but she wasn't afraid to let her personality shine through. There was something more to what creator Kieron Gillen originally envisioned as an anti-Indiana Jones for Star Wars. Her appeal was initially unexplainable. Aphra just had, you know, that "it" quality to her.

Her adventures continued in the pages of the *Vader* series, but her fan base grew (as did that of her killer droid companions Triple Zero and Beete-One). The walls of someone else's story could no longer contain her and in December 2016 Marvel launched a Doctor Aphra centered comic line. It was no surprise why. As we learned more about Aphra, we learned more about her importance to this new Star Wars landscape and the fans that cherished her.

Though born twenty-four years before the Battle of Yavin on a peaceful planet that was on the outside of the Clone Wars strife in the Star Wars galaxy, her character design was what we Earth-bound folks call Asian and having had a past relationship with the equally unique Sana Starros, and later embattled Imperial officer Magna Tolvan, Aphra was also one of the first prominent LGBTQ characters in Star Wars. Representation in Star Wars had reached out and taken a front seat during the build-up to *The Force Awakens*, and Doctor Aphra had fought her way to the table. No one could make her leave.

The comic book series in which she leads has proven to be a wild, sometimes whacky, and unapologetically different kind of a Star Wars story. Thanks to her archeologist skillset, we've gotten to dive into some ancient histories and mysteries. Thanks to her conflicted moral center (she's got no love for the Empire, but also no real love for the Rebels), we've gotten to go to some darker Star Wars underworlds and occasionally see a cute Tooka Cat or two used as a bomb. Thanks to her vibrantly stubborn independent streak, we've gotten to explore different kinds of family histories and romantic

relationships. Star Wars romances are by nature sweeping and epic whereas Aphra's are in flux and intriguingly more combustible. All this means is that the adventures of Doctor Aphra often run in their own lanes. There is a weird 1970's sci-fi vibe amongst the backdrop of the more traditional Star Wars stories.

And it's hard to turn away.

Doctor Aphra arrived in Star Wars on the move, in danger, and full of wisecracks. She hasn't stopped running and she's so much more. Fan fervor led to the creation of her action figures and she is often the number-one character people want to see jump off the page and onto the screen. Her stories are unique, new, and, yes, challenging, but at the center of it all, more than any specific moment, shines this wonderful character that represents so much to so many. Above all, Doctor Aphra represents possibilities.

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## **BODHI ROOK MAKES IT RIGHT**

### **THE PURPOSE AND DEATH OF A WORKING MAN**

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

There is a key moment in *Rogue One* when Bodhi Rook, Imperial pilot turned Rebel, talks with Jyn Erso about her father Galen. Bodhi was entrusted by her father with the all-important message of how to destroy the still-in-construction Death Star. That is literally the weight of the galaxy on the shoulders of a “simple” cargo pilot for the Galactic Empire. Yet Bodhi Rook is no menacing agent of evil. He’s a working man, a blue-collar denizen of the galaxy, who joined the Empire because it was a way to stretch beyond his home world of Jedha, support his family, and find his place in the galaxy.

Though he aspired to be a fighter pilot (the “I wanna be a quarterback” of the Star Wars galaxy), Bodhi settled into his cargo pilot gig, seemingly unaware of the abominable intentions of the Empire, which is a notion that is not hard to believe. The Empire is truly “galactic” and if you’re serving it in a small corner of a larger picture, you might not have the chance to see the damage done.

Some Imperials on the Death Star weren't even sure what had happened when Alderaan was destroyed by the very space station they were working on. Bodhi Rook was truly just doing his job, for better or...as he started feeling...worse. Bodhi's soul starts to waver and wander and that's when Galen finds him. He was compromised in the best of ways.

So, Bodhi, still shaken by the effects of the mind-melding interrogation wrought on him by Saw Guerra's Bor Gullet creature, mumbles to Jyn that her father entrusted him with the important message along with the words, "This would make things right." Bodhi hadn't directly brought evil to the galaxy, but he was a small cog in the Imperial wheel. The look in his eyes is that of man facing down his purpose and knowing it's a hard road. A road he has to take. By this point, he had already taken the message and defected to the good guys. He truly did want to make things right and felt he was doing his part to bring peace and justice to the galaxy. The cost was his life.

Bodhi took this path for himself, for his family, and, yes, the galaxy, but you have to assume that, all along, Bodhi was feeling good about the actions he had taken. Oh, he probably wasn't worried about the glory, but he was probably looking forward to the adulation after and knowing that, when he saw his family again, he'd be a hero to *them*. Not part of the fire fight raging around him on Scarif, Bodhi is suddenly tasked with the mission-saving action of manually connecting the ground crew to their Rebel saviors in the skies about them.

Bodhi steps out of his comfort zone, into the crossfire, and succeeds, directly communicating with the great Admiral Raddus and the Rebel fleet. The lowly cargo pilot has saved the day. He's made things right and not just for himself. He quietly whispers, "This is

for you, Galen.” Sharing the justice with another character who died trying to make things right.

In a split second, a life-ending beat, a fragmentation grenade is tossed onto the stolen Imperial pilot ship and lands in front of Bodhi Rook. It’s one look, one read, but it’s one of the best acting moments in Star Wars. Riz Ahmed captures the panic, pain, confusion, loss, resignation, and resolve Bodhi Rook feels in that moment. He’s about to die. He took a chance. He risked it all for the greater good and there will be no parades, no medals, and no adulation. The only thing Bodhi Rook, a simple cargo pilot, received is knowing that he succeeded in what he had originally set out to do: make things right.

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## **"APOLOGY ACCEPTED, CAPTAIN NEEDA"**

### **THE SYMPATHETIC PLIGHT OF IMPERIAL OFFICERS**

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan and Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

They're cold, calculating, scheming, skilled and sharp. They are also blinded by ego, fueled by fear, often ineffective, and prone to bickering and posturing. These are the officers of the Galactic Empire and when Captain Lourd Needa slumped to the floor of Darth Vader's Super Star Destroyer, slowing dying as he apologized for his mistakes, it was pretty clear that for the Empire good help is both hard to find and harder to keep.

Emperor Sheev Palpatine had some big plans and wild dreams when he switched the Grand Republic into the Galactic Empire on a dime. Almost overnight, nearly everything changed. The equipment, the uniforms, the ships. It was quite an undertaking, but all of it was necessary for Sheev to achieve his dreams and it was something he had been working on for most of his life. It would be inspirational if not for the fact that he's an evil Sith Lord. While he played on the fears of the people and promised a "safe and secure" society, Palpatine was hell bent—or is it Sith Bent—on conquering

every part of the known galaxy, oppressing what was now his to help build his war machine, and using it all to search far beyond his kingdom for ancient dark side mysteries, relics, and weapons that would extend his reign of terror. That's a lot on an evil guy's plate. Sheev Palpatine can't sweat the small stuff. So, the day-to-day operations of running the galaxy had to fall into the lesser hands of the Imperial officers.

Yes, for a long time, there was still a so-called working government in the galaxy, but, by the start of the events in the original trilogy, military control is in full effect and the rising Rebellion could no longer be ignored. The importance of the Imperial officers, including Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin, were paramount to the survival of the Empire. The trials and tribulations—and ill-fated careers—of these officers are a somewhat unintentional sub-stories of the original trilogy. Can the Imperial officers simply survive themselves?

In *A New Hope*, we are introduced to Imperial officers almost immediately. They're lap dogging around the cape of Darth Vader in the halls of the just captured *Tantive IV*. They're opinionated for sure, most definitely smarmy, but project an air of competent confidence. Soon, though, we meet the higher ups. The next level of Imperial bosses. And we learn something else: they love to fight with each other, no one is on the same page, and Darth Vader has no problem choking them. Specifically, the snarling Admiral Conan Antonio Motti. It's an interesting scene. This all-powerful Empire is in the hands of this bunch? Sure, we all get into disagreements around the conference room, but when the big boss starts Force-choking middle management—something's not right.

Yet you have to feel for them in a weird way. Imperial officers can't win for losing. Even the destruction of the first Death Star was a lesson in this. With the Rebels swarming around the Death Star,



General Moradmin Bast approached Grand Moff Tarkin with some sobering news. Imperial analysis had exposed some level of danger in their attack. General Bast had done his job and found a problem. He told his superior. Tarkin brushed him off with blustering misplaced confidence in his prized moon-sized weapon. Moments later, they were both dead.

Captain Firmus Piett was a very competent officer stuck behind the dullard Admiral Kendal Ozzel. His reward for Ozzel's clumsy incompetence was a promotion full of the stress of knowing his boss was choked to death right in front of him. You can't make mistakes, and no one can perform under that pressure. Hell, even the ice-cold General Maximilian Veers successfully leads the ground assault on Hoth and is never really seen again. Moff Tiaan Jerjerrod is given control of the second Death Star but is not given the proper resources to finish the job. His reward is to go down with the figurative ship that he was not able to build properly. Even Rae Sloane, a fascinating character, introduced in the original trilogy era novels and comics, carries the flame of the Empire to the bitter end and her reward is to try and build the First Order surrounded by lesser minds and mad men.

And then we go back to Captain Lourd Needa. Proudly in command of the Star Destroyer *Avenger*, Vader's original command ship, he was in hot pursuit of the coveted *Millennium Falcon* when it suddenly disappeared from the ship's scopes and seemingly vanished. That wasn't Captain Needa's fault. Han Solo had just pulled off one of his trademark miracle plans. That wasn't Captain Needa's fault. His staff had failed to track a ship that simply shut off its engines and attached itself to their ship. That wasn't Captain Needa's fault. Famed bounty hunter Boba Fett seemed to know what was happening but sat on the information to help him collect his bounty. None of this was Captain Lourd Needa's fault, but, like a

good leader, he was prepared to take the blame and he went straight to Lord Vader's chambers on the *Executor* to apologize.

Needa had served in the Navy of the Republic, fighting in the Battle of Coruscant and transferred his allegiances to the Galactic Empire right at the beginning. He worked his way up, getting promotion after promotion. After nearly two decades of distinguished service he had found himself in charge of one of the prized ships in Vader's Death Squadron. He took responsibility for one mistake. Just one. Captain Lourth Needa's reward was to slowly have the life choked out of him. As he fell dead, Darth Vader grumbled, "Apology accepted, Captain Needa." What is the incentive to serve the Empire? What is the reward for a job well done? The Rebels certainly toppled Palpatine's armies, but when you watch the death of Captain Needa, you know the structure was built on sand.

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# GOODBYE, MISTER BONES

## OR HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE A BATTLE DROID

*Empire's End: Aftermath*

Author: Chuck Wendig

A young adolescent child has to endure his father being captured by the dreaded Empire and then watches as his mother leaves to join the Rebellion against said Empire. Though left with his mother's sister and her wife (one of the first same sex couples in Star Wars), he feels alone on a small planet in a galaxy now exploding in war. Skilled as an engineer and builder, he rebuilds an old Clone Wars-era B-1 battle droid, modifies it with weapons and a red paint job, and programs it to be his only friend...and murderous bodyguard. It's a coming-of-age story fit for any children's movie, perhaps even including the droid's tendency to resort to joyous violence. Maybe. Years later, the droid would be reunited with his friend and maker in the midst of the final battle of the Galactic Civil War, save him from certain doom, only to be destroyed in front of the boy turned warrior. The young man holds what's left of his only friend in his arms as he cries amidst the backdrop of the Empire's fiery fall.

How's that for a story pitch? It's a beautiful moment, tear inducing to many, myself included, and absolutely a reason to love Star Wars. The journey to get to that point, though, was a delightful challenge. The kind of challenge that makes you grow as a fan.

If you love Star Wars long enough, eventually you'll run into a character, a story, or moment that you, well, just don't like. It's ok. Don't feel guilty about that; just try to not let the hate flow within you. The Star Wars saga is big enough to take your resistance to parts of it. You can be a Star Wars fan and not like the new Sarlacc monster in the *Return of the Jedi* Special Edition. You don't have to love porgs. It's not a requirement that you cheer on a frog officer or boo a shark villain. Star Wars is a big universe; there are things for everyone to like and dislike. And some fans thought they found one such thing when Chuck Wendig's Aftermath series introduced the best buddy of Temmin "Snap" Wexley, a repurposed and reprogrammed battle droid named Mister Bones.

Yep.

Mister Bones.

Allow me to break out with an editorial piece here. I hated Mister Bones. It was a hard sell for a lot of fans. Silly name even if it is a play on B-1. (B One—Bone—Mister Bones.) Comic book-like modifications to the droid itself. And a relic of the prequel era. Fun nostalgia for some, sensitive topic for others. To be clear, if you haven't noticed, I like the prequels. Even the "Roger-Roger" of the battle droids doesn't spin me off into a world of Star Wars fan angst.

But Mister Bones, though...

It was a hard sell for me, but I am not just speaking for myself here. Mister Bones was a hard sell for many. Yet a funny thing happened on the way to the collective Internet comments section. Mister Bones, with his devotion to Snap Wexley and his violence, often the order unclear, started to grow on me. With each ALL CAPS line, each plot point—including him chasing and ripping the wings off a

butterfly, and each instance of murderous droid rage, Mister Bones slowly took his place in my heart.

And then he died.

That's when I knew it. I loved Mister Bones.

As described above, the death of Mister Bones is wonderfully dramatic. Even as you read it, you can **see** the cinematic nature of it. One of our heroes, Snap, sends his beloved droid off to help his mother Norra pursue Grand Admiral Rae Sloane and help secure the end of the Empire. Then, as the teenager takes to the skies in his first major battle, he almost takes out his own mother as she flies a stolen Imperial shuttle. Mister Bones emerges **ON** the shuttle, and the young boy and his pet—I mean droid—are reunited. **Then** the droid saves his maker as three sandtroopers and an AT-ST walker are about to kill him. This...this is great stuff. As you read this, you are pulled into this reunion so sweet songs should be sung about it.

Then two A-wings destroy the walker and take out Mister Bones with it in a tragic friendly fire incident.

Wait, what?

Looking back, we all should have seen this emotional gut punch coming. Not just right then, but from the beginning. Like any classic fairy tale with a younger child and their only friend, someone's gotta go...and it isn't going to be the child. Mister Bones is a tough sell at first and that's the point. He's a bit different while being very much from an era of Star Wars some fans struggle to love. Mister Bones is a challenge. However, piece by piece, moment by moment, Chuck Wendig makes you get to know Mister Bones. Understand him. You start to grasp his importance to Snap, essentially orphaned by the war. As Mister Bones starts to grow, even famously learning

that hugs are like violence made of love, we, too, learn to let our own walls down. Our preconceived notions of who and what we like in this franchise fade away. If we can learn to love a murderous battle droid, what other characters can we learn to love in this large galaxy? What stories can we connect with despite any misgivings early on?

We didn't know we needed Mister Bones in Star Wars until Snap Wexley finds nothing left of the droid to hold onto as he weeps into the hot sand of Jakku. In the pantheon of Star Wars death scenes, this moment deserves its revered station. It gets you perhaps because you never thought it would.

Goodbye, Mister Bones. Your violent ways will never be forgotten.

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# THE LAST SMIRK OF TALLIE LINTRA

## THE COST OF FIGHTING EVIL IN THE LAST JEDI

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

There has always been death in Star Wars and not just on the bad guys team. The good side pays a price as well. *A New Hope* starts with Rebel soldiers being gunned down in a hallway and ends with Luke Skywalker's childhood friend Biggs Darklighter being blown out of the sky by the villain later revealed to be his father. (Yes, many died on the Death Star, but at the time it was a fist-pumping moment because the good side won.) Death has absolutely been ingrained into every Star Wars story, but for the most part the focus was those losses being part of the battle. An almost celebrated red badge of courage. Then *The Last Jedi*, the eighth chapter of the saga, arrived and taught us how to feel a little deeper for the losses. There are faces connected to this death. Bright souls and valuable minds laying down their lives for the greater good, yes, but often needlessly. Saving what you love is a theme Rose Tico helps learn in the end, but there are deaths along the way that teach us why that's important. (Her sister's death being one that requires a deeper

look later on.) The death of Tallie Lintra is a signpost of the tragedy to come.

We meet A-wing pilot Tallisan Lintra in the opening moments of the movie as Poe Dameron recklessly leads an assault on the First Order's Dreadnought the *Fulminatrix*. British actor Hermione Corfield brings the character to life in an immediately engaging way. *ForceCenter* podcast host Joseph Scrimshaw once said that Hermione should teach classes on How to Act in the Cockpit of a Spaceship and he's very right. Tallie Lintra jumps off the screen and into the story as she leads the Resistance Bombers of the Cobalt Squadron into battle. She's in command, but charmingly excited to fight back. We instantly like Tallie Lintra.

And as we should. The character of Tallie Lintra represents the new face of the Resistance in this part of the Star Wars saga. General Leia brought some of her oldest and most trusted allies into her new cause. Veterans like Admiral Ackbar, Commander Larra D'Sni, Major Ematt, and Admiral Amilyn Holdo rushed to Leia's side to fight back, but they all knew the cause needed to be built from the strengths and passions of new heroes. Tallie Lintra is a poster child for that movement.

Hers is a story not unfamiliar in the Star Wars saga. Raised by a farmer on a faraway planet, Tallie longed to be a pilot and dreamed of being part of the bigger galaxy. But her quest for adventure turned to a role in a rebellion. She could have kept her head down and not gotten involved, but, like Luke Skywalker before her, Tallie Lintra entered the fight.

She was a natural and quickly impressed the top brass of the Resistance. She was still young and bright eyed, but she was a leader and a fighter. Soon she was given command of the Blue Squadron. Grizzled vets and young upstarts alike looked to her for

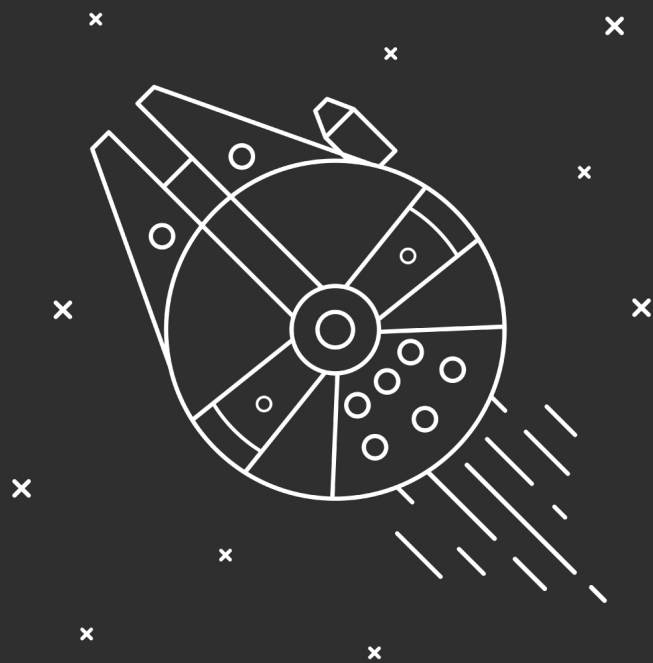


guidance in the heat of battle and this was very much on display during the Resistance's escape from D'Qar and counterattack on the dreadnought. Yes, there were great losses, but, you see, we're used to that in Star Wars. It's part of the story. It's what's expected. The "good folks" win, but some die in the process. Our heroes remain, though, and Tallie Lintra is clearly one of the new heroes.

However, that was not to be. The First Order strikes back! The Resistance fleet is tracked through hyperspace and an angry (or is it angrier) Kylo Ren personally leads a group of TIE fighters into action. Ace pilot Poe Dameron races toward the hanger. The fight is on. We then find Tallie Lintra in the cockpit of her A-wing. As she readies her ship for battle, she looks to her friend and pilot Stomeroni Starck. She's serious, focused, but, when he taps on the glass of his X-wing, they make eye contact and Tallie gives a salute and a sly smirk. Pure personality and purpose while seated in a cockpit. It's a smirk that says this is war, this is tough, but we're on the right side of this and, like the heroes of yore, we too will survive. Tallie Lintra is ready to fight.

Moments later, Tallie Lintra is dead. So is Starck. So are most of the Resistance's fighter pilots. Kylo Ren destroys them. The cost isn't just a group of nameless soldiers and pilots, it's a bright young woman that left her planet and family to win the day. To be involved. To take up the good fight against a great evil. With one final look, one little smirk, a hero dies, and we know that this chapter of the Star Wars story is going to make the characters and the audience deal with the fallout.

Rest in peace, Tallie Lintra.



# INTERLUDE #1

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE TOYS...

Sometime after the release of *The Empire Strikes Back*, my parents brought me over to their friend's house for a gathering. The adults milled about, doing whatever adults did before you grew up yourself and realized the adults at this afternoon gathering just wanted to stay long enough not to feel guilty for leaving early. Anyway. Being a shy, quiet kid, I was minding my own business in the living room. All the other kids were playing outside, freely roaming the streets of Orange County because those were the times. The adults must have felt bad for me because the dad of the house came downstairs with two large plastic cases shaped like heads or busts. My own father led me over to the cases. The Other Dad—the name escapes me and doesn't matter—opened the cases and revealed his entire collection of Star Wars figures. The classic Kenner figures. Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia, all of them! All. Of. Them.

I couldn't have been more than five years old and I had NO idea what I was looking at. And I mean that literally. As I wrote earlier, my first experience with Star Wars was seeing *A New Hope* in a drive-in theater with my parents. I was one. I have no memory of that. It wasn't until I saw that trailer for *Return of the Jedi* that Star Wars connected with me. That was when I first understood and comprehended what I was watching.

Yet I never forgot seeing those toys. The cases this man had brought down were the very collectible Kenner figure cases. One was the bust of Darth Vader. The other was C-3PO. I can still recall him

showing me and my father each figure, giving descriptions I wasn't understanding. It was mesmerizing to a nerd in development like me. And what remains is this: before I had fallen in love with Star Wars, I had fallen in love with toys. That is both amazing marketing for the movie and a testament to the power of Star Wars toys.

There are many reasons we love Star Wars and we're in the midst of diving into those moments from within the movies and stories that make up the franchise, but you could absolutely write page after page about the toys themselves.

These days, the toys and collectibles from this galaxy are on another level, and mostly targeted for adults. Oh, sure, they're in the "toy aisle" and sometimes adult collectors will have to wait patiently behind a parent and their child as they casually dig through figures and LEGO sets. But rest assured, it's the older generation of collectors buying them. I'm proudly one of them. For us, it's something that began in the '70s and '80s and, to our surprise, we didn't have to stop. Toys stopped being just for kids at some point. Perhaps it was the mid-90s when the Power of the Force figures hit shelves and rekindled fans' passions for those three and three-quarters inch figures? That's another book for another time.

Star Wars toys are very much a reason we love Star Wars. In fact, some of your specific "loves" are driven by the toys you had as a child. It's the genius behind the title of the Netflix series *The Toys That Made Us*. They absolutely did make us. I love the Y-wing fighter as you'll read later. I love it because that was the first Star Wars vehicle I owned as a kid. I no longer have the toy. (Sadly, having to trash it after it failed to survive a move nearly thirty-five years after it came into my possession during the Christmas of 1983.) However, the toy is what influenced my love of the fighter in the movies. When I saw it on screen it was like seeing a friend in your new classroom for the school year.

“Yeah! Y-wing is in my class!”

The classic Star Wars figures also helped fuel all of our obsessions with individual characters and those minor faces in the background. Sure, there were the big ones like the aforementioned Han, Luke, Leia, et al. But owning a Bespin Guard or Rancor Keeper figure was something special. It wildly expanded the Star Wars landscape for fans. The bit player or extra that appeared in one scene over Obi-Wan Kenobi's shoulder, was now in your hands and immortalized forever. If you owned Walrus Man, you wanted to know more about him. By the time he became Ponda Baba, thanks to the 1989 West End Star Wars Miniatures game, he was already a favorite of many. Simply because you remembered the figure as much as his gruesome end in the Mos Eisley cantina.

Star Wars and toys. They go hand in hand...and always will.

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## FINN AND POE ESCAPE

### NEW FRIENDS BRING US CLASSIC STAR WARS ACTION

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

When Star Wars fans settled into their (luxury) movie theater seats in December 2015, you couldn't blame them for feeling a little tense. Star Wars *Episode VII* was about to begin, and the pressure was definitely on *The Force Awakens*. You could (and someone should) write a book about that factor alone. J.J. Abrams and company had been tasked with bringing back Star Wars, introducing it to an entire new generation, satisfying generations of Star Wars fans with some pretty intense feelings about the saga, and needing to be perfect at every turn. Like a lone Ewok hammering the foot of a moving AT-ST, it was a tall order.

Yet *The Force Awakens* wasted little time in giving fans a sequence they could breathe easily about. First Order stormtrooper FN-2187 was having a change of heart about being part of an intergalactic team of bullies and he needed to leave the Star Destroyer *Finalizer* before his chrome dome of a supervisor could send him to the executioner troopers. So, he quickly concocted a hairbrained scheme to get out of his situation: rescue captured Resistance pilot Poe Dameron, steal a TIE fighter, and flee to safety.

Simple!

Except nothing is simple in this galaxy. Thankfully.

FN-2187 employs some false bravado and frees the Dameron and what follows is a fast-paced sequence full of a still tethered TIE fighter, stormtroopers blasting, and heroes on the brink of disaster. Like with most sequences in Star Wars, there is a lot going on within the dialogue and set piece that rounds out the story and pulls you in deeper to this new chapter of the beloved saga. We have a dashing hero flying like an ace as Poe Dameron is established as the go-to hot shot pilot. We have a reluctant hero finding a new identity as FN-2187, a nameless cog in an evil machine, becomes Finn. Yet, in this case, we can stay decidedly on the surface of the scene. Finn and Poe escaping the *Finalizer* let us know that Star Wars was definitely back.

The sequence comes just under twenty minutes into *The Force Awakens*. The first act is done, and we too are ready to break out just as these characters are. This is a literal smashing into the second act. Whereas the first twenty minutes of the movie did let fans relax just a little, we were still waiting to exhale. Laser blasts and lightsabers had already made an appearance, but by this point fans wanted to feel fully entrenched into a Star Wars movie.

So, enter traditional Star Wars bells and whistles (almost literally). The classic “Force Theme” rises as a music cue when our new heroes meet, and the pacing picks up while the tension builds aboard a very familiar Star Wars landscape—the hanger of the bad guys! And much like the events inside the Death Star in *A New Hope*, we are immersed into the situation with mumbled intercom broadcasts, marching troops, and mouse droids. We’ve been here before and we’re starting to get cozy.

The actual breakout includes an amazing new sound—the sputtering of the stolen TIE fighter—but even that gives way to classic sound of a TIE fighter roaring through space. For many fans, right here, right now, is the first time they’ve seen and heard a classic Star Wars space fighter since 1983! That’s not a judgement on the prequels at all, it’s just the reality of the situation and, as Finn and Poe race from under the belly of the First Order’s beast, blasting cannons along the way, this absolutely feels like Star Wars.

Ah. That phrase. “Feels like Star Wars.” That is the obtuse and somewhat magical phrase that is near-impossible to describe (much to the chagrin of Star Wars creators), yet you know it when you feel it. And as Poe flies the stolen TIE fighter back toward Jakku and Finn celebrates his first victory as a free soul, you absolutely get that magical Star Wars feeling. And then they promptly shoot out of the sky and go tumbling toward the planet’s surface. Our heroes are in trouble again.

Which, well, feels even more like Star Wars.



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# HAN SHOOTS BECKETT...FIRST!

## THE CEMENTING OF A STAR WARS TRUTH

*Solo: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Jon Kasdan

Director: Ron Howard

Han shot first.

We believe this to be true. We know this to be true. And, for years, we have remained at odds with The Creator himself, George Lucas, for the special edition change that aimed, at least in our collective eyes, to soften the hard edge of our favorite smuggler Han Solo. He didn't survive a point-blank misfire from the hapless Greedo. He shot first. Han. Shot. First.

Yes, there are many reasons we love Star Wars, but debating, discussing, and sometimes just simply throwing our collective hands in the air is also part of the journey. We love to get grumpy sometimes. Han Solo was a nearly perfectly crafted character, but George felt the need to change him just as he felt the need to change a lot of things in his original trilogy. The 1997 Special Editions (and the subsequent Special Special Editions) are really just a true artist continually battling his own finished product. Some of the changes are great and help flesh out the world more—think the remodeled Cloud City—while others certainly left fans

scratching their heads. (The Jedi Rocks musical number in *Return of the Jedi* never stops challenging you to question how much you love Star Wars.) But every one of the changes remained on the surface. Decorations on a cake we already know we love to eat. It was the change in the Han Solo moment that seemed to modify the very core of the character and DEAR GOD GEORGE WHY DID YOU—

Hold on. Take a breath. It's going to be ok.

Though the special edition of *A New Hope* remains in place as Star Wars canon and we might have to live our days accepting that Greedo missed (counselors are standing by). Han did shoot first. It was on the planet Savareen and Han killed his mentor Tobias Beckett seconds before he shot him.

Yet this moment, one of the big crescendos of *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, is not just a fun twist on a Star Wars fan debate. It's an insightful look at a painful lesson learned and a well-earned Star Wars moment. The Han Solo sitting calmly in Chalmun's Cantina when we meet him in *A New Hope* is a lot of things. Fancy words and phrases like world-weary, roguish, conflicted, and hard edged. Though, we all soon figure out what he's been trying to fight his entire life: deep down he has a heart of gold. However, that never means Han isn't capable of doing what must be done to survive. The special edition moment of Greedo shooting first does undercut that. The thought behind it was Han shouldn't be a cold-blooded killer because, well, he's a good person. Understandable, sure, but getting to the point of being the good person he is deep down is part of the journey we all want to go on. He kills Greedo because he has to, not because Greedo missed at point-blank range. Which is why the moment in which twenty-year-old Han Solo kills his mentor in cold, cold blood is such a rewarding scene. It's the journey to that point in Han's life.

Han Solo *is* a good guy (more on that soon). He grew up with that hard wiring in his brain, but he has already learned how to survive the tough streets of the Imperial-controlled Corellia without a true family and then as teenage cog in a low-level criminal organization. He can't afford to be the good guy. It's a game of survival and he wants to win. He feels he has to win.

So, Han Solo buries himself more and more into the life of an outlaw. Trying to form a new family unit with those around him while mistakenly focusing on his love for his old flame Qi'ra. He sees the glamour, starts to create a new version of himself, and has to learn the true cost of this life. But that's the rub—he doesn't learn it right away. Two of his new friends immediately die (the underused Val and charming Rio Durant). The droid L3 follows soon after. Han is then abandoned twice. Twice! And that is big to this good guy turned outlaw. His father abandoned him not through death, but through a drinking problem and the destruction of the once-grand Corellian shipbuilding industry (another casualty of oppressive foot of the Empire). Lando leaves him in the middle of a face-off with Enfys Nest and the Cloud Riders, and Beckett follows suit, not wanting to be part of a plan to deceive Dryden Vos. It's a cycle of trust only rewarded with abandonment in the life of Han Solo.

Then Beckett does more than abandon Han Solo. He turns on him. (Qi'ra does in a way as well but that's a different cost for Han.) Han is a loooooong way from the part of his soul that is a good guy. Qi'ra has told him that survival is more important than winning and Beckett has told him to trust no one because everyone is predictable. His support systems have completely left him alone and Han has now learned that he cannot wait for others to act on his behalf. He has to act first.

All of this builds up to the final moment between Han and Beckett high atop a sandy cliff on the picturesque planet of Savareen. Han has outsmarted his mentor and the crime lord Dryden Voss, but none of that matters now. He is facing off with Beckett. His mentor, yes, but his enemy for sure. Like he said himself, people are predictable, and Beckett is no different. As Han stands across from him, he now knows what Beckett knows—you have to shoot first.

*Pew.*

Han fires.

Beckett is dead.

Han rushes to his side, the good guy instincts still bubbling below the surface, but Tobias Beckett, who was probably a good guy once himself, confirms the lesson that Han just learned. Beckett would have killed him. He would have shot first. Han Solo and his copilot Chewbacca are alone in the galaxy now. They've lost friends, been abandoned and enslaved, and been double crossed again and again. They now know that to survive in this galaxy, you're going to have to shoot first. Something Han Solo believes in when he walks into that infamous Mos Eisley cantina just a few years later.

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## VADER'S GHOSTS

### DARTH VADER RETURNS TO THE PETRANAKI ARENA

Marvel's *Darth Vader*, Annual No. 2

Writer: Chuck Wendig

Penciler: Leonard Kirk

Inkers: Walden Wong & Scott Hanna

Colors: Nolan Woodard

There is something more going on behind that intimidating mask of the Dark Lord of the Sith. A stirring of memories, emotions, regrets even, that are constantly washed away by anger and hate. Vader has to keep fueling this rage. He works hard to maintain it, but the moments in which the veil falls away and we get a glimpse into the turmoil bubbling inside Darth Vader continue to be some of the most nuanced layers of the Star Wars story.

Vader remembers. Vader feels.

In the second annual issue of Marvel's *Darth Vader: Lord of the Sith* book, Chuck Wendig and the art team of Leonard Kirk, Walden Wong, Scott Hanna, and Nolan Woodard give us one of the best looks into Vader's mind. It's simple and direct. A flash of the past Vader fights to overcome and an explosion of the past Vader continues to stew in. Both feed the monster that lives behind the mask.

Darth Vader has returned to Geonosis and, more specifically, the remains of Petranaki Arena. He was last here during the events of the Clone Wars, when the second Battle of Geonosis took place, but his focus is on the first battle—which served as the beginning of the Clone Wars and the launch of the final chapter of Anakin Skywalker's life as a Jedi. On that day, Anakin and Padmé confirmed their forbidden love for each other among the shadow of certain death. Attachment was always a problem for Anakin, a tough lesson he continually had to learn and was often at odds with. But here, as he was about to be publicly executed, the man who would be Vader finally received the reciprocation of his love for Padmé. She, the strong-willed queen turned senator who regularly put duty before herself, had reached that point as well. They fought for their lives that day. Anakin was essentially defeated by Count Dooku, saved only by Yoda. Padmé, a politician with her mind always on a peaceful solution, was now in a war. Her confession of love and their kiss was perhaps the last pure moment the two would share without the specter of war and secrecy hanging over them. And it all began at the Petranaki Arena.

As Vader delves deeper into the Death Star project and plays detective as saboteurs continue to do everything possible to delay or stop the destruction of the superweapon, he finds a moment to wander into the arena that played a big part in his other life. He sees Obi-Wan Kenobi fighting the Acklay, one of three beasts sent into the arena to kill Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Padmé, and Mace Windu slaying battle droids. He had already helped kill one and would one day kill the other. He sees Padmé, his wife, the one the Emperor claims he killed, engaging in those infamous “aggressive negotiations.” And, most importantly, he sees himself. Young and in the thick of a fight he once believed in. One far different than the fight he is in now. It's no longer a fight against Separatists and Sith Lords. And he's not just fighting Imperial leaders and a growing

Rebel insurgency. He is fighting that image of a young Jedi. He is fighting his choices. Darth Vader is fighting Anakin Skywalker.

The image of Darth Vader, walking around the arena in silence, hands behind his back, head down, submissive to his haunted memories, has emerged as one of the more powerful moments in the conflicted life of Anakin Skywalker. As a reader and Star Wars fan, it stuns you upon arrival. By this point in the issue, you are knee deep in the delicious rivalry between Tarkin and Vader. You're getting tasty morsels of canon connecting the prequels, *The Clone Wars*, and *Rogue One*. And you're witness to the moment Palpatine lets Vader know he is under the command of Tarkin. Then you turn the page and are faced with the inner workings and internal struggle of a monster.

It's just a beat and the story continues. Vader's sleuthing leads him back to the nest of the Geonosian queen and her hive—the saboteurs. Vader is merciless. Like he did once before, he uses his lightsaber to slash through the Geonosians. The queen has no chance. She's cut into pieces. Vader at his worst? No, it's Vader as he might have always been. For a second time, Wendig takes us back to his past and we see the image of Anakin slaughtering Tusken Raiders as he did in *Attack of the Clones*. The words that were once a harbinger of what was to come are echoed, "They were animals. So, I slaughtered them like animals." The fight between Darth Vader and Anakin Skywalker goes on.

Star Wars is driven by the timeless saga of good versus evil. Yet just beneath the surface are lessons and signposts for our own lives, often from surprising sources. It is initially a bit odd to see yourself in the life and times of Darth Vader, the iconic symbol for evil in the galaxy, but as his story continued to change inside the walls of the saga that became less and less of a stretch. I learned to feel for Vader as I'm sure you did. He was trapped. As Vader wanders silently

through the Petranaki Arena, coming face-to-face with his ghosts, you can't help but look back at your own journey, take a moment to consider the failures, and hope, that unlike Darth Vader, you won't repeat your darkest of days.



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## **"IT'S BEAUTIFUL"**

### **THE MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT DREAMS OF ORSON KRENNIC**

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

No matter what your vocation is, no matter what career path you're on, you want to succeed. You want to know that your work is being appreciated and the credit you deserve is coming your way. Promotions? Sure. Accolades? Definitely. Yet at the end of the day, we all just want one thing: respect from those we work with and for. Which is why the ballad of Director Orson Krennic in *Rogue One* might ring true for many. (Slightly odd because, you know, he's not the nicest guy around.) Krennic's single minded quest to rise in the ranks of Imperial middle management is relatable, but the lesson waiting at the end of his journey is a strong statement about being consumed by your own obsessions.

Orson Krennic was a top engineering student during the final years of the Old Republic and all he wanted were simple things like recognition, power, and prestige. Before the end of the Clone Wars, Krennic became aware and later involved in the massive project that was the construction of the first DS-1 Orbital Battle Station a.k.a. The Death Star. It became his life's work. The Clone Wars ended, and the Galactic Empire was born. Krennic slid on into those new

uniforms (added an amazing cape) and began the long quest to complete this “technological terror.” From early on, we learn two things about Orson Krennic: He wants a better place in the power structure of the Empire and, even then, he’ll want more. Yet, at every step, Krennic is met with opposition and subterfuge. Not from those dastardly Rebels, though. No, his greatest enemies are his bosses.

Oh, yeah, Krennic’s tale is one of office politics on a grand scale.

There is a key peek into the mind of Krennic during the events of *Rogue One*. One that speaks of what is to come and serves as insight into how far he has compromised his own humanity in his quest for power. When Governor Tarkin calls for a demonstration of Krennic’s prized Death Star, he targets the historic Jedha City. A peaceful city that was a mecca for the spiritually enlightened and those seeking solace and comfort. Miles away from the center of the city, Jyn Erso cries before a holorecording of her father and extremist rebel Saw Gerrera hears and feels a rumbling in the far-off distance. For the first time in history, the Death Star has fired on a target. Jedha City is being wiped out of existence.

In the *Rogue One* novel by Alexander Freed, we experience the destruction from the city itself as citizens and left-behind stormtroopers alike are wiped from existence in a flash. In the movie, we—perhaps fortunately—watch from ground level as the destruction works its way from Jedha City out into the desert where Saw’s Partisans have been hiding. It’s a horrible wave of earth, wind, and fire. A world is being torn apart. As we witness the panicked last moments for many, many lives, we suddenly switch perspectives.

High above, from the command center of the Death Star, Orson Krennic watches the destruction that his machine hath wrought. Far removed from the voices of those dying, Krennic stoically takes

it all in as the explosion and ensuing shock waves roll over the surface of Jedha. From here, it is a macabre art piece, the center of the blast point reaching up to the heavens like a blood orange flower in full bloom. Clouds billow outward, framing the deadly center. Shockwaves fan out in a perfect circle, almost reflecting the very Death Star itself in its own destruction. Krennic is short of breath. He inhales and musters up one thought as he watches the absolute annihilation of a city, a people, a culture, and eventually a planet.

“Oh. It’s beautiful.”

That is followed by a subtle nod. A quiet, personal affirmation that his project does, in fact, work as he believed it would when everyone else doubted. His sick joy is clear, and his thoughts are confirmed moments later when Governor Tarkin, the only Grand Moff in the Emperor’s service, praises Krennic’s work...and then promptly takes it from him. Krennic breaks for good at that point.

The rest of *Rogue One* finds Krennic slowly losing his mind over having his aspirations taken from him on many levels. Things start going from bad to worse for him. Rebels strike the research center of Eadu. His top scientist and possible information leak Galen Erso is killed. While arriving on Scarif in a simmering panic to plug security breaches, the Rebels attack in an effort to steal the dataplans and technical readouts for the Death Star itself. His moment of triumph has become Orson Krennic’s Very Bad No Good Day.

All this leads to the mad pursuit of Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor as they complete the Rebellion’s Hail Mary pass to get the Death Star plans into the hands of the Rebel Alliance. Krennic himself faces down our hero Jyn, daughter of the man who was playing him all along. He is so focused on her. So focused on her exposing

that his beloved Death Star is now a ticking time bomb that will cripple the Empire. So focused that his lifelong obsession has been undercutting him all along that he falls prey to a blaster shot from the injured Cassian Andor. Cassian and Jyn leave, their mission complete.

Orson Kallan Krennic, the director of advanced weapons research, didn't begin his career wanting to build a weapon that could wipe out entire planets in the blink of an eye. He was an architect, a future leader, and a bright mind. But along the way, he allowed himself to be consumed with his aspirations, the pursuit of prestige, and the never-ending thirst for power. It all led to his final moments. Coming to a lonely platform, high atop the Citadel Vault on Scarif, he looked up at Death Star as it blocked out the sun and took aim on the planet. Grand Moff Tarkin himself gave the order to fire and, in a well-engineered flash, just as he always intended, Orson Krennic was wiped from existence. Destroyed by the embodiment of his own obsession.

A lesson in office politics indeed.

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# THE GOOD SMUGGLER

## WHEN QI'RA SAW THE TRUTH IN HAN

*Star Wars: Most Wanted*

Author: Rae Carson

Qi'ra knows Han.

In one of the key moments in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, our favorite scoundrel tries to convince himself that he is, in fact, the rogue scoundrel an entire fanbase thinks he is. It's the identity he craves, so he stands up straight, puffs out his chest, and proclaims to Qi'ra that he is a bad guy. Not beholden to anyone or anything.

But again...Qi'ra knows Han.

She tells him plainly that she is the only one that knows what he really is. He's the Good Guy. Han smirks. Nah. He's not. He can't be. He won't be. This starts a personal journey and internal struggle that will dominate Han Solo for the rest of his life. Han knows what he wants to be, but he can't escape what he is. Qi'ra is right (she often is), Han Solo is a good guy. A legendary one.

Han Solo and Harrison Ford became icons at exactly the same time. They are forever entwined (even when Harrison doesn't want that to be the case). Indiana Jones showed up as well and a new type of big-screen hero was born. Every generation has one, yes, but for those in the late 1970s and 1980s, this was yours. The dashing rogue with a heart of gold. Stoic yet snarky. Reserved but passionate. Loyal and

brave, but on the run. You love him, and he knows it. Han Solo is the man of action who is still just normal enough to make you believe you could be him as well. Throw all those descriptors against the wall and they'll stick. Every one of them. Han Solo is a legend for a reason.

However, this great character can too easily be watered down into bad and sometimes emotionally destructive tropes. The stoic nature can start to lack empathy. The romantic assertiveness becomes a power grab. The roguishness can lack commitment to a cause bigger than himself. And this version seems fine but, as Han Solo fans, we should want more. Han would be an incomplete character if that was it.

Which is why Qi'ra telling Han the truth, he's a good guy, is absolutely one of the best moments in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. It's as if Han has been battling those exact tropes himself from this moment to his last one. All of this is worth its own entry. However, there was something intriguing about the conviction in Qi'ra's belief. Where she got the belief is the more impactful moment and it happens in the novel *Most Wanted* by Rae Carson.

In that story, Qi'ra realizes Han's true nature and his character is revealed in a small, intimate fashion. Though still young, she is already long used to being overlooked, underestimated, sexualized, and dismissed. Qi'ra experiences a moment of respect and finds her own strength reflected back at her.

Back on Corellia, not too long before the events of *Solo*, Qi'ra, Han, and their Rodian pal Tsuulo are on the run, following a botched job for Lady Proxima that leaves them tied up with some larger criminal syndicates and Proxima's own henchmen. In a moment of vulnerability, Qi'ra takes Han and Tsuulo to the safe house she had been secretly using for years. Teenage Qi'ra and Han finally have

a chance to stop and talk as friends, not rivals in the White Worm gang. Han calls her the smartest, most competent person he's ever met. Qi'ra has to wonder if Han is just flirting. But he isn't. Qi'ra realizes that he is being very genuine.

Actually...let's stop and highlight the words written by Rae Carson. They're important.

"He was acknowledging her worth from a place of genuine respect."

Let's be clear. Qi'ra knows who she is. This isn't a case of Han saying something that suddenly unlocks the truth and confidence inside of her. No, no, no. Though she's still young and developing her skills as a future—well—leader of a crime syndicate, Qi'ra knows who she is. What this moment confirms is that Han is the first person to see her as she is. He has taken the time to see her. Not a concept. Not a conquest. Not a cliché. Han sees Qi'ra completely. This goes on to be a valuable and important trait for him. He sees Beckett as he really is, saving his own hide in the process. He sees beyond the muddied, growling beast to the true partner Chewbacca can be. The naive farm boy up against impossible odds becomes the brave fighter worthy of his help. And, yes, the princess in distress becomes the fiery leader that has the strength to carry the weight of the galaxy on her shoulders while constantly inspiring and challenging him to be better. This is the core of Han Solo.

This perspective is made more powerful because it comes from the mind and eyes of Qi'ra. Let's be honest, Han's probably not even aware of what he's doing and even if he was, he might brush it off as he pushes himself back toward the cool parts of being a bad guy. No, this needs to come from Qi'ra, and it was wonderfully written. Lawrence and Jon Kasdan created a great character in Qi'ra, and Emilia Clarke brought her to life, but through the words of Rae Carson (and additionally Mur Lafferty in the novelization of the

movie), we get an insight to Qi'ra not previously presented. And because of that insight, we get to learn that you can't just say you're good, you have to be good.

A classic antihero. A dashing rogue. The good smuggler. Yes, Han Solo is all of those things. He always will be, but, rest assured, Qi'ra was right, Han Solo is a good guy. A *complete* good guy.



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## LEIA AND PANAKA

### THE DAUGHTER OF A QUEEN UNKNOWNLY GOES HOME

*Journey to Star Wars: The Last Jedi, Leia, Princess of Alderaan*

Author: Claudia Gray

Not many write Princess Leia Organa better than Claudia Gray and her 2017 novel *Leia, Princess of Alderaan* took fans on an insightful journey through the sixteen-year-old mind of a future Rebel leader. Leia, born to a dying Padmé and figuratively dying Anakin Skywalker, grew up as the adoptive daughter of Bail and Breha Organa; safely hidden in plain sight from the enemies that would want her destroyed. The book treats fans to our first in-depth look at the influence the Organas had on Leia's formative years. While it was easy to assume Bail Organa's influence on his daughter, Gray's writing shows Breha Organa's tremendously large part in raising, mentoring, and inspiring Leia. As Leia rapidly gets involved in the desolate and troubling state of the Imperial-run galaxy, new friends like Amilyn Holdo (later a key player in *The Last Jedi*) and first love Kier Domadi, and pilot Ressa Batten hop on board a story that takes us to new and familiar planets like *Rogue One*'s Wobani, *The Last Jedi*'s Crait, and to the planet Onoam which was a moon near the prequel planet of Naboo. Which marked Leia's first trip to the sector of the galaxy in which her birth mother was once queen. It was a fun—wait—wait—Young Leia went near Naboo?!?!

Yes. Yes, she did...and it turned into one of the tensest moments in all of Star Wars.

You see, Leia meets Imperial sector governor Moff Quarsh Panaka while on the moon of Onoam. The same Panaka who was called Captain Panaka when he served Padmé as her security advisor in *The Phantom Menace*. The same Panaka who transitioned from the Old Republic to the Empire. The same Panaka who remained loyal to former senator from Naboo, Sheev Palpatine, after he became the Emperor.

Panaka met Leia...and it nearly destroyed the growing Rebellion.

Though it ends with a deadly explosion, their meeting was a quiet, seemingly simple moment. Accompanied by the current Queen of Naboo, Dalne, and unaware of her true lineage other than the knowledge that she was adopted, Leia walks into the personal chalet of Panaka to discuss the conditions of miners in the system. As her outfit was dirtied due to a trip through the mines, she borrows a dress from Dalne. A traditional Naboo jubilation dress. You've seen the dress before. Padmé wears it at the end of *The Phantom Menace*. Which, of course, means Panaka has previously seen the dress as well. On Padmé. And like mother, like daughter, Leia strolls into the foyer of his chalet and Panaka freezes as if he's seen a ghost. Which, in a way, he has.

It is at THAT moment that Star Wars fans steeped in the inner workings of the saga froze as well. Princess Leia of Alderaan was about to be identified as the offspring of Anakin Skywalker and Padmé Naberrie by a man with a direct line to the one person with a keen interest in killing her. It's chill-inducing. And those Nerd Chills are part of the reason we **love** Star Wars.

It makes perfect sense and, with the appearance of Panaka, is a great use of connected Star Wars canon. While the Emperor, like many, knew Padmé was pregnant at the time of her death, he was not sure of what happened. Even with his handle on the Force, the Skywalker twins seem to have eluded him. (If only he had thought to go back to Tatooine and look up the last name Skywalker in the phone book...) That either of the Skywalker children had yet to be found was important.

“The Emperor knew, as I did, that if Anakin had any offspring, they would be a threat to him.” So said Obi-Wan Kenobi, one of the few, along with Yoda, Uncle Owen, Aunt Beru, and the Organas, that not only knew the true lineage of Luke and Leia but had charged themselves with protecting them from Palpatine and Vader. They were once and future beacons of hope that would illuminate the galaxy. It was vital to everything that they survive. Which takes us back to this moment as Leia stands before Panaka.

He’s polite, in keeping with his reputation as a “good” Imperial, but the former member of Padmé’s inner sanctum digs into young Leia’s past and upbringing. He syncs up her age and adoption by Bail Organa, a known associate of Padmé, to the same time as Padmé’s death. He clearly can’t ignore the striking resemblance between them, particularly in the same dress. It doesn’t take much. Panaka knows. Holy crap, Quarsh Panaka knows that Leia is the daughter of Padmé and Darth Vader and he quickly ends the meeting, agreeing to Leia and Dalne’s requests in a curiously unchallenging manner, and vows to go contact Palpatine himself to let him know the Organas have adopted a daughter of “such distinction.”

I don’t know about **you**, but it was at this exact moment that I was completely lost in the tension of the storytelling. (But, please, I actually do want to know about you at this moment. Let’s talk later.) Leia was sixteen in this book. We know that she survives. The

Emperor never finds her. Vader doesn't learn about her until the very end of his life. Everything turns out just fine!!!

Yet, as Panaka vows to report back to the Emperor, I, an allegedly fully functional adult, found myself completely sucked into the moment. The future hope and survival of the Rebellion that we all grew up rooting for were potentially on the brink of disaster. There would be ramifications for Leia and the Organa family. There would be ramifications for the planets and systems aligned with the movement. There would be ramifications for the galaxy as a whole. Tension. Lore. Revelations. Tremendously high stakes. And it all came down to a teenaged princess standing before an Imperial Moff tied to her family's past. A hold-your-breath moment to make you love Star Wars.

Oh...for those that didn't read it...how does it turn out?

Fair question. The resolution ties together the prequels, the original trilogy, *Rogue One*, and (now) *Solo* in a violent, uncompromising peak into the ways of the growing Rebellion. So, for once, I'm going to shut my mouth and let you enjoy it for yourselves.

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## ACKBAR'S SIGH

### FEELING THE WEIGHT OF VICTORY

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

In *Star Wars*, it's always been clear that the Rebels were certainly “rag tag.” The heroes usually are the underdogs in high space fantasy. However, go with me here, for several decades of *Star Wars* viewing you got a sense that it was easy for the Rebels. Not, you know, the actually defeating the Empire part, but easy in the sense of a group of like-minded souls got together to fight the villains. The heroes were just always the heroes. Ready to take on the Empire. But, as we saw with Cassian Andor and his past, in the modern era of *Star Wars*, the leaders of the Rebellion had been building their “team” for years. Pulling together support and supplies from all parts of the galaxy. Cobbling together separate and often decidedly independent cells of resisters and creating the Rebel Alliance. It was tough work. Tiring work. In-fighting and debates about **how** to go about rebelling were just as taxing as the actual rebelling.

The victory over Yavin 4 and the miraculous destruction of the first Death Star was certainly a watershed moment for the Rebellion. It struck a blow to the Empire for sure, but everything the Rebels had been preparing for, fighting for, and, above all, dying for was building toward the Battle of Endor. The Alliance had the Emperor

and his regime on the chopping block, and this was the last chance to topple an Empire.

It wasn't looking good, though. Attacking on two fronts, the Rebels were scattered amongst the trees on the floor of the forest moon and they were caught in a trap in the stars above. The Emperor, it would seem, had been expecting this. It was looking bleak. Then a Rebel hero emerged. A-wing pilot Arvel Crynyd was shot down by the enemy but used his last moments alive to crash into the bridge of the Super Star Destroyer *Executor*. The mighty ship, the centerpiece of the Imperial Navy, crashed into the surface of the Second Death Star and the tide of the battle was turned. At that moment, Admiral Gial Ackbar sighed in his seat aboard the bridge of his ship *Home One*. It was the sigh heard around the Rebel Alliance.

Admiral Ackbar is a beloved character in Star Wars for many reasons. First appearing in 1983's *Return of the Jedi* as one of the new leaders of the aforementioned rag tag Alliance, he immediately had your attention because he was a walking, talking calamari. No longer just an appetizer at a fancy Earthly dinner, Ackbar was barking orders and leading the space battle from a command chair that seemed to float through the ship's bridge. It was both wonderfully bizarre and perfectly normal for Star Wars. After all, we'd been rooting for a "walking carpet" named Chewbacca for years.

Then Ackbar's famous words became legendary. Early on in the battle he blurted out, "It's a trap." As pop culture went from a quaint part of your childhood to a big business, Ackbar yelling "It's a trap" became a shared inside joke, a reference that transcended the IP it originated from, and a calling card for the character. Odd because as someone who first heard that phrase in the theater during the film's original run, it never stood out as anything special. It just

seemed like an astute observation that the situation just got worst for our heroes. Which, well, it did.

This **was** a trap. The Emperor had been pulling the Rebel Alliance into this end game move and he had his figurative foot on our heroes' throats. The panic in Ackbar's "It's a trap" moment, and the frustration Lando Calrissian exhibits at the idea of retreating seconds later, weren't about **this** battle. It was about **all** the previous battles. All the lives lost to this point. It was about the weight of all the lives taken to that point. It was panic, frustration, and fear that a movement that had really begun over twenty years earlier when the Supreme Chancellor proclaimed himself Emperor was about to come to a destructive end.

But the heroes kept fighting and the tide started to turn. The Ewoks went from cuddly friends to invaluable allies. Luke Skywalker threw down his lightsaber and this began the sequence of events that would lead to his father's redemption and the Emperor's demise. The shield generator around the Death Star was finally down. Lando, Nien Nunb, Wedge Antilles and the remaining Rebel fighter ships went into the second Death Star in an effort to make the fatal blow. But none of that meant victory was assured. The ships needed more time and realized they needed to take down the *Executor*. As mentioned previously, taken down it was. And that was when Ackbar sighed.

Watching this now, you realize that much like the first time you heard Ackbar bark about the Emperor's trap, this sigh now carries more significance and takes on additional meaning. While his command crew cheers and the Super Star Destroyer falls toward the surface of the Death Star to meet its fiery end, Ackbar sighs and slumps back in his chair. He is not just relieved. He is tired, having been fighting for years. He realizes how close they came to losing and what that would have meant. And he wonders what the cost

of it all will be. This sigh is THE emotional core of the Rebellion's last stand against the Empire. In the movies, the actual battle still needs to be won (moments later it is), but, as you see this now, you connect to Ackbar in this moment on a different level. We all want that moment when you lose the figurative weight you have been carrying and, despite all the trials, doubt, and pain, it was worth it. You want to experience that sigh of victory.



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# THE MYTH OF LUKE SKYWALKER

## REY AND FINN KNOW HIS NAME

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

The ending of *The Force Awakens* was a huge risk. The return of the franchise promised the return of our heroes Luke, Leia, and Han, the heroes a large percentage of us grew up with. Han was there. Leia was there. But where was Luke? The entire premise of the seventh chapter in the Star Wars saga was hinged around Luke Skywalker, **the** Jedi Knight of Jedi Knights, being gone. He had vanished. Poof. Off searching for the first Jedi Temple. Off running from the mistakes of past. The final sequence in which Rey, our new hero plucked from the sands of a faraway planet, slowly walks up ancient steps on Ahch-To to find Luke Skywalker is the most unique ending in the franchise. More could be written about it—actually (spoiler) I'm *going* to write more about it. Stay tuned. The ending of *The Force Awakens* was a huge risk that paid off with big rewards, but a lot of that was built upon a quick, little moment early on in the movie in which Rey identifies Luke Skywalker as a myth many no longer thought was real.

Rey and Finn meet in the dusty marketplace inside Niima Outpost. He's a stranger on the run, already lying about why to himself

and soon to her. After a one-sided tussle that finds Finn on the wrong end of Rey's staff, Finn comes clean about one thing: BB-8 is carrying a map to Luke Skywalker.

In one beat, Daisy Ridley's Rey goes through a galaxy of emotions. At the mere mention of Skywalker's name, Rey turns back to Finn like he's spoken in a secret language, given the special password. A lot has happened since Luke Skywalker stood victorious among his friends on the moon of Endor. Twists and dark turns that found a bona fide hero of the Rebellion essentially turned into a ghost and a whisper. Yet the whisper was powerful enough to reach the ears of a young scavenger living alone on Jakku. By saying the name Luke Skywalker alone, Finn has her attention.

Within a fraction of a second, Rey's attention becomes a hopeful confirmation that the myth just might be real, and the galaxy does have a hero in it. She whispers back to him, being sure to keep the possible confirmation of the secret between them, "Luke Skywalker? I thought he was a myth." There is a smile behind the first part of this response. Rey is excited by this news. She's always dreamed of what was beyond this planet and her own life even as she was convinced she couldn't be a part of it.

Living in the shell of an Imperial walker that took part in a legendary battle, Rey has spent her days in literal proof of big moments before her time. She occasionally wears the helmet of a fallen member of the Rebel squadron known as the Tierfon Yellow Aces and daydreams about the galaxy beyond her self-imposed walls. Yet all that has never been enough for her to believe in the Legend of Luke Skywalker or herself. She's doesn't accept that there is something more and definitely doesn't believe she'll ever be a part of something bigger than the endless rolling sand dunes she sees before her.

Yes, sounds familiar. Luke Skywalker started out his journey in a similar manner. Staring off into a binary sunset, convinced this was as far as he'd go. On one level, it's that vaunted "Star Wars poetry" that George Lucas always talked about. On another level, though, it is used here again because it is still just as powerful now as it was then and is part of the lesson inside Star Wars. The hero's journey often begins with someone who doesn't believe they belong on this path. We've all been there. We all might still be there. Or will be again. Every generation looks ahead at what might be and expresses—or even believes—all the doubts placed there by themselves or society.

"I can't do it." That is our own myth we believe.

Rey's sly smile turns serious as she adds, "I thought he was a myth." It's as if she can't accept something that wild being true. Finn doesn't have time to confirm or deny it. (And he's not sure himself as the First Order doesn't exactly want people to believe in heroes like Luke Skywalker.) The adventure kicks into high gear.

Rey is off on her hero's journey and we've been pulled along for the ride, almost forgetting this small little moment back on Jakku. We're caught up in her meeting old heroes, her fixation on wanting to get back home, and revelations about her possible past and potential future. It all moves so wonderfully fast, that you don't catch your breath until Rey is losing hers as she stands in front of Luke Skywalker at the end of the movie. It is then that you can reflect back on this first moment when excitement, hope, and doubt coursed through her words: "Luke Skywalker? I thought he was a myth." The weight of the moment is now felt. The unbelieving girl from nowhere is standing on a mysterious hill discovering that the myth of Luke Skywalker was real...and so is she.

And so are all of us.

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## NIGHTSISTER

### ASAJJ VENTRESS GOES HOME

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Season 3,

Episode 12, “Nightsisters”

Writer: Katie Lucas

Director: Giancarlo Volpe

Asajj Ventress was popular from the moment she first appeared on screen in the cult favorite 2003 animated *Clone Wars* series by Genndy Tartakovsky. Like a lot of elements, characters, and moments introduced in that series, Ventress outlasted the series being moved to the background, not counting in Star Wars canon, and replaced by the more well-known *The Clone Wars* animated series. Based on early designs for the apprentice to replace Darth Maul, Ventress struck a similar chord amongst fans. Snarling and angry, strikingly beautiful with her unique look, Ventress was a sleek dark assassin with two red lightsabers. A blunt object working for Count Dooku. Like Grey DeLisle before her, Nika Futterman’s raspy take on her voice was dripping with the vengeance fans want in an evil, dark side Force user. Yes, Ventress did bad, bad things and she did them really, really well.

But who was Asajj Ventress?

Katie Lucas knew. One of George Lucas’ three children, Katie had worked her way onto the writing staff of *The Clone Wars* series, and there was one character she identified with the most: Asajj

Ventress. In the third season of the series, Katie Lucas tapped into Ventress' female rage and search for her own identity to create a magnificently layered character on a sympathetic search for personal peace. That powerful and bittersweet journey began when the punk rock killer went home and into the arms of the Witch Mother Talzin.

Abandonment is a recurring theme in Ventress' life. She's been cut adrift, sent away, backstabbed, and left for dead. The Nightsister coven of Force-sensitive witches in which she was born into had to surrender Ventress to a pirate when she was a baby—a payment for the safety of them all, apparently. Raised as a slave to this pirate Hal'Sted, a young Ventress actually grew to have an affinity for him, but he was murdered by rival pirates. She was then discovered by a Jedi named Ky Narec. He trained her in the ways of the Force, an unofficial Jedi Padawan on the planet they were stranded on. He was promptly killed in front of her by more pirates. Strong in the Force, but now alone, her anger led her to the dark side and the service of Count Dooku, fallen Jedi turned Sith. Under orders from a Darth Sidious concerned of her power, Dooku turned on her and had her killed in battle (or so he thinks). See a theme here? Yeah. Time after time, Asajj Ventress is abandoned, fueling her unfulfilled desire for vengeance.

Broken down to her very core, she returns to Dathomir. Her coven sisters emerge, not yet knowing who she is, and surround her as a threat. They call Ventress what she has felt like her entire life: a stranger. Here, though, through Katie Lucas' words, Ventress finds herself. "I'm not a stranger," she says before falling into the arms of Mother Talzin. The healing has begun and so has her journey.

An episode of Jennifer Landa's podcast *Happy Beeps* on the *ForceCenter* podcast feed points us to a 2011 *Wired* article by Jason B Jones promoting this episode's arc. Katie Lucas talks about Ventress

finding herself, saying “she nobody’s pawn anymore. She finally owns herself.” It is a powerful proclamation that turns this loved but somewhat one-dimensional character into a beacon for those on their own journey for agency, identity, and peace. She IS angry and violent, torn apart and in pain. She never had a chance at being anything else until she decided to do something for herself.

The image of Ventress in the arms of her figurative mother is a moving image, but it is just the beginning of her journey. There is much more to come, even more displacement and abandonment. The story of Asajj Ventress was almost never completed, but unproduced episodes of *The Clone Wars* series were turned into Christie Golden’s book *Dark Disciple*. There, we get to read the final chapter of Asajj Ventress’ journey. She, like many of us, just wanted to find her own purpose in the galaxy, not be part of someone else’s, and she deserved peace. She tragically achieved that in the end, but, thanks to Katie Lucas, she started that quest the moment she went home.

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# THUMBS UP!

## HOW BB-8 STOLE THE SHOW

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

Introducing a new set of human heroes to the Star Wars world was a tall order indeed. Rey, Finn, and Poe Dameron would have to stand next to legends like Han, Leia, and (eventually) Luke. Standing Kylo Ren up next to Darth Vader was challenging as well, but at least with the villains, you can throw on a black cowl and give 'em a red lightsaber and you're a few steps closer to making fans happy. Creating new leads in Stars Wars was absolutely going to be a tough sell, no matter how you looked at it. However, the mammoth task of creating a new droid for everyone to love was the biggest test of all and the success of BB-8 has as much to do with the widespread affection for *The Force Awakens* as anything.

BB-8 needed to work. He wasn't just up against the fandom's affection for C-3PO, R2-D2, and, all right, any of the Gonk droids. This new astromech was up against a challenging history of getting fans to accept characters built with a little humor and whimsy in mind. Of course, the prequels had perhaps the biggest challenge with Jar Jar Binks and even young Anakin Skywalker himself. Beyond that, though, there have been characters that the fandom initially rejected for being a tad too precocious or jokey. Ahsoka Tano's growth from snippy pre-teen to revered fan

favorite is legendary now but was hard to imagine in 2008. Ezra Bridger and Chopper from *Star Wars Rebels* also come to mind and we'll see where Bucket from *Star Wars Resistance* ends up. So, yes, BB-8 needed to work and there was a lot of pressure on that little round droid.

Lucasfilm must have felt confident or it was a galactic case of "fake it until you make it" because BB-8 was everywhere leading up to the film's release. He was touted as a "practical effect" and paraded out for conventions. Remote control toy versions were promoted as hot ticket items. The droid was even used to sell oranges. (And, yes, I bought some.) So, maybe none of BB-8's later success as a well-received character was surprising to them.

Yet when BB-8 first rolled into Lor San Tekka's hut and warned his best buddy Poe Dameron of coming trouble, all eyes and ears were on the beeping ball. It seemed to work. Right? Then he fled from the trouble with an important mission—a mission not unlike Artoo's in *A New Hope*—and we needed to root for him. Then BB-8 met Rey and the charm of this new droid started to work on us as it was also working on Daisy Ridley's character. As he warbled, beeped, and rolled around Rey like a loyal dog following its new, beloved owner, you got a sense that BB-8 was working. Still, he could have still stepped in the proverbial Star Wars poopie and exclaimed, "Peeeeee yousa!"

All of this. The subtle charm, feisty nature, and resilient soul of this new droid led up to THE BB-8 moment. His first bit of Star Wars legacy. The GIF and meme-worthy moment that cemented his place in the hearts of the fandom: The thumbs-up to Finn.

A Star Wars moment in which a droid sticks out a metallic arm with a lighter on the end of it and gives another character a "thumbs-up" was, as Governor Tarkin would say, "an awful big risk here." If the



build-up is done wrong, this moment between Finn and BB-8 just might take Star Wars fans, occasionally, uh, steadfast in their views of “what feels like Star Wars,” out of the movie. Yet as Finn begs BB-8 for help in looking cool in front of Rey, we’re on board. BB-8 has our attention, our imagination, and, thanks to a sad head bob on Jakku, our sympathy. We also know that he’s smart and clued in. Well aware that something isn’t on the up and up with Finn’s sale pitch of being part of the Resistance, BB-8 has a big moral decision to make: trust this former stormtrooper with good intentions or blow his cover.

With a contemplative swivel of his head, BB-8 decides. He gives Rey the location of the Resistance base and keeps Finn’s cover. Finn gives him a thumbs-up and BB-8 returns it. There wasn’t a screening of this movie during its initial theatrical run that I saw in which the audience didn’t love this moment. The reaction was the same every time. Laughter and joy. It worked. It was funny on its own but showed us the true nature of this droid we were about to be spending a lot of time with.

Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, Lando Calrissian, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and even Darth Vader were the big names we looked up to and followed for movie after movie, but C-3PO and R2-D2 made it all feel connected, as if you were watching the stories unfold with friends. That was a valuable part of the previous movies’ success. All that weight was placed on the virtual shoulders of BB-8. There wasn’t even another new droid to back him up. Perhaps because Threepio was still going to be fretting his way around the galaxy, BB-8 was a solo act. This was all on him, but with one thumbs-up, BB-8 stole the show and let us all know that we had a new friend for these new stories.

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# Y-WINGS TO THE RESCUE

## CELEBRATING THE WORKHORSE OF THE REBEL FLEET

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

As the Battle of Scarif raged in the skies above and the beach below, there is a moment that brought a certain group of Star Wars fans to their collective feet. I am part of this group, so I will try to remain as impartial and emotionally detached as possible. (I'm going to fail.) Gold Squadron, led by that salty Rebel veteran Jon "Dutch" Vander, raced across the battle and used their ion torpedoes to disable the Imperial Star Destroyer *Persecutor* after a member of the Blue Squadron disabled some of their deflector shields. This led to Admiral Raddus's great decision to ram the *Persecutor* into the Star Destroyer *Intimidator*. A move that led to the Rebels being able to beam the Death Star plans off the planet. Gold Squadron was made up of Y-wings. And BTL Y-wings starfighters are the best starfighters in the galaxy.

Ok. Ok. That's, just, you know, my opinion, man, but the Y-wings getting their day—as well as the debate over which starfighters are the best—is definitely a reason to love Star Wars. It is what fans have been doing since they first saw Star Wars. In playgrounds, at work, at parties, and, later, podcasts, the fun—and often silly—

debates over these little details in the saga are a large part of what keeps bringing us back.

Y-wings have been a part of Star Wars from *A New Hope*. Dutch Vander was there with his Gold Squadron and, in fact, took the first shot at destroying the Death Star. He and his wingmen Dex Tere and Davish “Pops” Krail were destroyed. There were eight Y-wings that flew into that battle and only one, piloted by Evann Verlaine, survived. The Death Star, as history recorded, was blown up by that blonde-haired farm boy Luke Skywalker. And that Skywalker kid was flying an X-wing.

Oh, those precious X-wings. Everybody loves the X-wings!!! Blah blah blah. I get it. The X-wing is the lead singer of the Rebel forces. Sleek and near perfect in design. The ship is the poster child of vehicles. It’s what a space fighter should look like. Yet hiding in the shadow of those classic X-wings are the true workhorses of the Rebel fleet, the Y-wings.

They are bombers, vital to the cause because of their abilities to soften the Imperial defenses. Yet they are slower and bulkier, and their design is a tad clunky. Hell, they are named after the letter Y and we all know the letter X just looks sexier than the letter Y. Later on, we are introduced to those cute little A-wings, zipping around the fight like yappy little dogs, and those exotic B-Wings, heavy bombers themselves but their unique design turned heads like a fancy dress on a fashion show runway. *Rogue One* introduces us to the troop transports called the U-wing. Late to the party, they still brought a sleek design and threatened to overshadow those sad sack Y-wings.

Yet in the middle of battle, their moment arrived. Soaring across the screen in all their Y’ness glory, Dutch Vander and his team, for once, got to finish what an X-wing started. Their ion torpedoes slammed

into the bridge of the Imperial Star Destroyer. As they flew away, a smile crept across my face. It wasn't just me smiling in that movie theater in 2016. It was me, a young fan in Christmas of 1983, smiling as I opened up my first ever Kenner Star Wars space fighter toy—the Y-wing. Star Wars is as much your memories then as it is the moments right now. Godspeed, you Y-wings.

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## "SEISMIC CHARGES!"

### ONE SOUND CAN BRING YOU BACK

*Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*

Writers: George Lucas & Jonathan Hales

Director: George Lucas

Ranking Star Wars films can be a fruitless endeavor. With more movies on the way, it's a given you're going to have to adjust the list and, just when you think you have a handle on your own personal ranking, your mood changes. It's entirely conceivable that you could "rank" the Star Wars movies differently every single day. However, it is a relatively safe bet to say that 2002's *Attack of the Clones* will, more often than not, find its way to the bottom of the list.

Containing some of the stiffest dialogue in the already maligned prequels, as well as some of the most cringe-worthy comedy moments, *Episode II* can prove to be a challenge for even the most celebratory Star Wars fans. Yet...YET...there are some great Star Wars moments within that movie. Moments that are often rediscovered and appreciated upon repeated viewings. And much like how Darth Maul or the furrowed brow of Qui-Gon Jinn kept the harder-to-please fans around for *The Phantom Menace*, there is one sound that continues to bring people back to *Attack of the Clones*: the sounds of the seismic charges.

With Obi-Wan Kenobi in hot pursuit of Jango Fett's iconic *Slave I* spaceship, the bounty hunter heads directly into the asteroid

field around the planet Geonosis. With his son Boba cackling at his side, Jango releases a canister from the back of the ship. Kenobi's astromech R4-P17 beeps a warning as the Jedi exclaims, "Seismic charges!" Watching this for the first time, a Star Wars fan might assume what's coming. An explosion. (I mean, it's always an explosion, right?)

It is an explosion! But this is an explosion unlike any previously seen—and heard—in Star Wars. A bright blue ball of energy pops onto the screen and is promptly followed by silence. Yes. Silence. Like a hit rock radio single pausing just before the band hits the catchy chorus, the sound design of the seismic charge contains a powerful beat of deafening silence. Then as the waves of the charge magnificently spread out through space, ripping apart any asteroids it finds in its path, we get to hear vibrating, metallic roar that absolutely dazzles your ears.

And then, as you try to process the mesmerizing effect you've just witnessed, Jango releases a second one and you hold your breath in anticipation—because you're downright excited for a sound effect! Obi-Wan manages to escape both charges and his private eye detective mission continues, but the seismic charges linger in your senses just a little longer.

It's another moment of triumph for legendary sound designer Ben Burtt. Like the *Pew Pew Pew* of the blasters before this and countless other sounds and noises, Burtt has given us one of the most delectable feasts for our eyes and ears. Described as an "audio black hole," Burtt drew inspiration from the airlock sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and an old sound editor recalling the method of "painting" out sound just prior to explosions in old films. Whatever the inspirations, Burtt succeeds in creating a memorable moment... and memorable moments bring you back.

Is it a far stretch to say ONE sound kept many fans around for a movie they didn't enjoy? Maybe. But it can't be denied: the seismic charges are at the top of the "yeah, but..." list for this movie.

Fan One: "I didn't really like *Attack of the Clones*."

Fan Two: "Yeah, but...those seismic charges were really cool."

Fan One: "Oh, yeah, I love those!"

Buried beneath the silly comedy, the somewhat stilted love story, and awkward CGI clone troopers of *Episode II* are some important moments in the greater Star Wars saga. They are there for you to enjoy. You just have to break through the challenging stuff like, you know, a seismic charge exploding through asteroids in the middle of a space fight.

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# STAR-CROSSED LOVE

## THE STORY OF CIENA REE AND THANE KYRELL

*Star Wars: Lost Stars*

Author: Claudia Gray

Two young lovers from opposite sides of a war that has been tearing apart the galaxy, raised on the same planet but forbidden to love each other, reunite on the fiery bridge of an Imperial Star Destroyer as it races toward the surface of a planet. This spectacular and timeless moment is what *Star Wars* is made of and for. Good and evil battle, the fate of many hangs in the balance, but the focus is the individuals and their connections with those they love. It's epic and grand. Truly fit for a saga of this scale. And it leaped off the pages of a so-called young adult novel in the early days of the new *Star Wars* canon. Arriving in 2015, Claudia Gray's *Lost Stars* remains one of the best reads of the *Star Wars* saga as it stretched beyond its marketed reach to capture the hearts of fans everywhere.

Ciena Ree and Thane Kyrell are the Romeo and Juliet of *Star Wars*. No other way to look at it and, quite frankly, I wouldn't want there to be. Born on the Outer Rim world of Jelucan, Ciena Ree grew up as a descendant of the First Wave of the planet's colonizers. They are poor, working class, and looked down upon by the Second Wave, which, of course, is how Thane Kyrell grew up. Naturally, they would meet as children, become friends and flight training partners, and go on to join the Imperial Academy to serve the



government that took over their planet shortly after the fall of the Republic. From there, love *should* grow. Sweeping romance, especially sweeping *forbidden* romance, is a key ingredient to Star Wars. And the love of Ciena and Thane is sweeping indeed. Sweeping and surprisingly layered and complicated.

The real victory of Claudia Gray's story is that it is set against the backdrop of the Galactic Civil War, the central conflict of this tale that we've all been studying since 1977 and makes us look at those events from a new angle. The book flies in and out of important moments in the original trilogy. Assigned to the Star Destroyer *Devastator*, Ciena Ree is part of the capture of Princess Leia's ship and even watches (and doesn't shoot) the escape pod carrying C-3PO and R2-D2. Thane Kyrell is part of the Imperial team that searches the alleged location of the Rebel base on Dantooine. And they both experience the shock of Alderaan's destruction and the loss of the Death Star.

That is where the story really goes in an important direction. For the first time, we Star Wars fans—particularly the longtime ones—get to witness these iconic events through the eyes of those affected. It never shies away from the concept of the Empire as the source of oppression and evil in the galaxy. (It leans into it actually.) However, the Galactic Civil War's bigger moments are able to be analyzed as never before as we explore these new points of view. The complete annihilation of Alderaan is abhorrent to our young Imperials, challenging and confusing, even if, like Ciena Ree, you initially buy into the Imperial talking point of doing it to prevent an all-out war. Then, when the Rebels and Luke Skywalker “save the day” and destroy the Death Star, we don't just learn that nearly one million Imperials were killed “by terrorists” as some explicitly say, but we learn some of the names and faces. Ciena and Thane suffered personal losses on that day.

Yet the Civil War and the actions of the warring factions continue to affect our two lovers in different ways. The aristocratic Thane Kyrell finds the actions of the Empire despicable and joins the Rebellion just prior to the Battle of Hoth. Ciena Ree, perhaps finding some comfort in being on top of the power structure for once, remains conflicted but loyal to a regime she truly believes is bringing peace through order. They're taken far apart from each other, on the opposite ends of a war that could very well find them facing off against each other.

The story continues to have some melodramatic fun ducking around the corners of the original trilogy. Events from *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* are told from the vantage point of Ciena and Thane. It's fun and only occasionally veers into the Forrest Gump-like feeling of our characters being there for every big moment. But all of this leads up to the grand finale. Love and war amongst the chaos of the Battle of Jakku.

Thane is sent to infiltrate and take over the Imperial Star Destroyer *Inflictor* under the command of—but of course—Ciena Ree. Learning of a breach in the ship, Ciena evacuates her crew and decides to crash her ship to keep it out of the hands of the Rebels. This leads to the moment this entire story has built to. Long-lost lovers and friends on opposite sides come face-to-face as their lives are about to end. It's powerful, tear-jerking, and downright pulpy, Shakespearean fun. Star-crossed Star Wars love indeed.

The true end result is that the bar was set early for all subsequent Star Wars novels. The fandom was absolutely smitten with this story. (It is still the novel I suggest new readers start with.) What Claudia Gray managed to do was not only create memorable new characters that inspired and connected with fans, she was also able to take our view of Star Wars, specifically the beloved original trilogy, and present to us all a new and thought-provoking

perspective. There had already been some solid new Star Wars novels by this point, but when Thane Kyrell leaned his battered forehead against Ciena Ree inside a decimated escape pod on the war-torn surface of Jakku, we all realized what we were expecting to read going forward: new answers to old questions about good, evil, war, and the love that rises above it all.

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## WAR HEROES

### BB-8 AND R2-D2 RECALL THE HORRORS AND VICTORIES OF WAR

*Star Wars: Poe Dameron*, Issue 28 “The Awakening”

Writer: Charles Soule

Artist: Angel Unzueta

Colorist: Arif Prianto

“Wars not make one great.”

—Yoda, *The Empire Strikes Back*

The idea that there is more to just shooting and fighting in these so-called Star Wars has always been present inside this saga. The original trilogy was full of epic battles and good fighting to defeat the bad but always took a moment, particularly in *Episode V* and *Episode VI*, to examine the effects of wars and the warriors that wage them. As the saga has rolled on, the creators, from George Lucas in the prequels to the authors, directors, and storytellers of this modern Star Wars age, have had more time to explore the realities of war. Both how and why you get to that point, and what happens to you and the world after, are themes that pop up again and again. And one of the most beautiful, touching, and surprising moments came in the twenty-eighth issue of the *Star Wars: Poe Dameron* comic book. It involved two war veterans you never viewed as such.

Writer Charles Soule and the art team behind the issue pulled off a wonderful bait and switch that drove the point straight into your

Star Wars fan heart. By this point in the comic's run, the story had "moved past" the events of *The Last Jedi* and was using conversations between characters like Rey, Poe, and Finn to look back and fill in some blanks, both big and small, between *Episode VII* and *Episode VIII*. So, we begin with two unknown Resistance fighters talking about the Battle of Starkiller Base. One was there. He remembers almost every pilot AND astromech droid that flew into the battle. The other was regrettably absent from the battle but clearly has seen action before as he recounts the legendary Battle of Yavin, and the losses felt there. He also knew Han, believes in Leia, and has been close enough to witness the potential and power in Rey. As a reader, you're immediately pulled in and wondering who are these two? It's not Poe, right? The first one refers to Poe as being at the battle with him. Is the second one Wedge? He was at the Battle of Yavin but has yet to appear in the sequel trilogies. The ghost of Biggs? The ghost of Ello Atsy? And now one of them is talking about being present for a lot of important moments in history and feels like it is his destiny. **Who are these warriors?**

You turn the page...

...and it's BB-8 and R2-D2.

Mind blown. Mind absolutely blown.

The two most famous astromech droids in the galaxy are in the belly of the *Millennium Falcon* as it races away from Crait and the First Order and they're having an in-depth, pained, and, above all, hopeful conversation about the conflict they are both playing key parts in. The beeps and boops of these two droids have been replaced with their actual words. We're going beyond what we always thought of these droids and getting the full sense of their involvement in the fight for survival and freedom.

We should have seen this coming. As BB-8 goes into detail of the desperate assault on Starkiller Base, he takes great care to mention every astromech droid present and laments the one he can't remember (vowing to find the name and commit it to his memory banks). R2-D2 does the same, remembering not only the loss of pilot Jek Porkins, Red Six at the Battle of Yavin, but his droid R5-D8. We've never really experienced that in Star Wars. Oh, yes, we've felt the loss of droids before (rest in peace, Obi-Wan's friend R4-P17). We've seen a gonk droid cry out in pain in the dungeons of Jabba's Palace. We've laughed along with K-2SO and sympathized with L3-37. But, let's be honest, for most of our lives as Star Wars fans, our view of the droids has been similar to the reaction to R2-D2 being blasted by Darth Vader's TIE Advanced in the trench run sequence in *A New Hope*. Vader shoots, R2 explodes, and Luke says he has "lost Artoo." Back at the Rebel command center, C-3PO reacts, worry and concern somehow emanating from his droid eyes, yet no one else registers as much as a sideways glance.

No. One.

Not Leia. Not General Jan Dodonna. No one else there reacts to the news of R2-D2 being apparently destroyed. And, in a way, so has it been with us. We like these droids. We don't want anything to happen to them. But, in general, we're here for Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Princess Leia. And, look, maybe **you** always had the droids in mind, but I have to admit to the cold, hard truth: I never looked at the droids as war veterans and **THAT** is the reason to love this Star Wars moment.

In the pages of a comic book, we get to spend time alone with two droids that have fought in almost every battle we've watched. More often than not, they've saved the day. They've lost colleagues and friends. They've lost faith and struggled to keep holding onto hope. As you read each panel, take in every word, you can never see BB-8

and R2-D2 in any other light. They are not war heroes. They are heroes who answered the call to fight for causes they believed in.

And then C-3PO cuts them off. Oh, Threepio...

66

## ORDER 66

### THE FALL OF THE JEDI

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Yes.

Yes, I did it.

The 66th reason we love Star Wars is, in fact, the Order 66 sequence in *Revenge of the Sith*. Absolutely. Look, I tried not to put it here. It's too predictable, right? Plus, the sequence is pretty damn powerful, so I argued with myself on this one. Put it higher, don't go for the joke. Yet, here we are. Be honest, though, if I didn't put Order 66 at number 66, you'd never forgive me. I couldn't forgive myself. I might never be allowed to write another book again. You have to take the shots life gives you.

So, yes, Order 66 is at number 66. Let's do this.

While passing on his father's lightsaber to Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan gave him, and us, the scoop on the vaunted Jedi Knights. "For over a thousand generations," he laments, "the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic, before the dark times, before the Empire." From those words, the imaginations of Star Wars fans ran wild. How could the Jedi Order have fallen? How **did** the Jedi Order fall? We know they fall,



and we've been promised that it has something to do with Darth Vader. George Lucas finally gave us the answer in 2005's *Revenge of the Sith*. Whether or not you take to that movie might very well depend on how you feel about the Order 66 sequence itself. It is the literal destruction of the Jedi. (Or the bulk of the Jedi. Put a pin in that thought.) It answers the question of how it happened and that might be the problem for some. Sometimes the answers you receive aren't the same as the ones you thought of.

It is fair, though, to question the Order 66 sequence to some degree. I'd be lying to you if I said it immediately grabbed me. I had spent my entire Star Wars fan existence to that point building up this image of Darth Vader racing around the galaxy, pointing out Jedi to the Emperor while they took turns destroying them. I'm sure I wasn't alone.

"There's one, Emperor," exclaimed Vader.

"Wipe them out, Darth!" laughed the Emperor.

Actually. You know, I'm glad ten-year-old me didn't get to write the destruction of the Jedi. Let's keep that moment in the hands of the man who created the lore of the Jedi. There is always room for questions and doubts in Star Wars; just don't let it dominate your movie watching destiny. Like a lot of things in George's prequels, if you're willing to take a breath and dig a little deeper, you just might find something more enlightening, fulfilling, and important than you could have ever hoped. So, it is with the Order 66 sequence. None of the questions can take away the emotional pull of the sequence. It is not just the fall of the Jedi, it's the fall of peace, the shield of the Old Republic is being pulled away. It is the very core of *Revenge of the Sith* and it is built on wonderful small moments. Each adding pain and insight into the annihilation of the Jedi Order.

Following the death of Mace Windu and the fall of Anakin Skywalker, the Order 66 sequence begins with the first act of Darth Vader: marching in front of the 501st Battalion straight into the Jedi Temple. It's a symbolic return to the institution that made Anakin, and, in some ways, broke him. It's also one of the greatest shots in Star Wars. The clone troopers march in step while the cowed face of a fallen Jedi walks into a new life of evil. Stunning in its directness. (Bonus points to Rian Johnson for paying homage to this shot as Kylo Ren marches into the base on Crait in *The Last Jedi*.) That is an awe-inspiring moment on its own, but we're just getting started.

The order to wipe out the Jedi is actually given to Commander Cody on Utapau seconds after sharing a moment with old friend and battle mate Obi-Wan Kenobi. Here, we get to feel what the betrayal means. The Jedi became generals of the clone armies, something that was at odds with the code of the Jedi, but it didn't change the connection that was built over the course of the war. The Jedi and clones fought and died together. However, thanks to an inhibitor chip implanted in the brains of the clones, the relationships were flawed from the start. The clones were always supposed to kill the Jedi. This a powerful and tragic betrayal. The clones fire on Kenobi and he falls to his presumed death. We don't get to feel it up close, though. George saves that for what's coming.

On the inclement planet of Mygeeto, the venerable Ki-Adi Mundi charges into battle, but the stomp of the clones' boots stops. Ki-Adi turns, and actor Silas Carson captures the intimate feel of this betrayal. This skilled Jedi doesn't have a chance. Not just because he is caught unaware and outnumbered, but because his mind cannot believe that the ones so close to him, could bring about his death.

By the time Aayla Secura's death on Felucia takes place, the music of maestro John Williams has taken over. His score soars over the

treachery but is heavy with sadness. Yoda clutches his heart and so do we. Before we can recover, the deaths of Plo Koon and Stass Allie drive home the point that none of the Jedi had a chance. Plo Koon discovered Ahsoka Tano and was part of the Order's backbone. In a flash, he dies unceremoniously, scattered among the debris on Cato Neimodia. Stass Allie dies in a similar fashion. The death is mounting.

The sequence ends on two different notes. On Kashyyyk, Yoda senses what's happening and decapitates his would-be killers and heads to safety on the shoulders of Chewbacca and under the protection of Chief Tarful. It's the moment of respite in a dark time. It's short-lived. Darth Vader is about to take his darkest step. While the clones of the 501st run through the Jedi Temple, killing Jedi Knights, Darth Vader walks into a room of only Jedi Younglings—the children training at the Temple.

For many, Darth Vader killing Younglings doesn't sit right. It's not so much the act itself, but, perhaps, it's the fact we were always told Vader helped the Emperor hunt down and kill the Jedi. That does happen, though. Later on. Many Jedi survived, and Vader does go out into the galaxy to hunt them down for the glory of his master. Marvel Comics and novels are covering this ground. Like that or not, it's part of the story. At this moment, Darth Vader has a choice.

One Youngling, Sors Bandeam, steps forward and places all of his trust in the man he still believes is Anakin. "Master Skywalker, there's too many of them. What are we going to do?" With a crack, Vader's lightsaber is out and actor Ross Beadman, all of six years old, gives the best flinch in Star Wars. Order 66 will not spare him nor his friends. Yes, it's horrible, but that's what George Lucas intended.

Beyond George Lucas deciding to show us the most brutal choice Vader could make, I've always seen this—George hasn't told me what he meant exactly—as a young, sandy-haired boy not unlike the podracing, droid-building youngster we first met in *The Phantom Menace*, staring up at what that boy became. It is Darth Vader's first test at destroying everything he once was. As the sequence ends, Darth Vader takes his first step at killing his past. Lil' Ani Skywalker does not survive Darth Vader.

Order 66 shows us a lot. The pain of betrayal. The cost of war. And, in many ways, it illustrates that the death of the Jedi Order, that powerful institution of heroes that were once the peacekeepers of the galaxy, came from within, destroyed by the clone troopers they agreed to lead into battle. Order 66 is the sequence *Revenge of the Sith* is built upon. It is the answer we never really wanted, but most definitely needed.

65

# FROM EWOK TO MARAUDER

## THE CHARACTERS OF WARWICK DAVIS

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

In 1983, Wicket W. Warwick carefully padded across the forest floor of Endor and jabbed Princess Leia in the side with a wooden stick. The princess immediately came to and soon met her Ewok friend (thanks to a shared snack, of course) and we all met Warwick Davis. We didn't know it then, but a wonderful new Star Wars tradition had begun: Warwick Davis and Star Wars.

For all intents and purposes, that was supposed to be it. The Star Wars saga on the big screen had come to an end. Warwick played the now world-famous Ewok two more times in the Ewok television movies for ABC, but that was it. He soon starred in *Willow* and, like many Star Wars actors before him, went on with his career. Then George Lucas decided to do it all again and Warwick Davis came back to the Star Wars galaxy in *The Phantom Menace*.

As Wald, Weazel, an unnamed street trader, and a stand-in for the practical Yoda for some scenes, Warwick had a full plate. His appearance as Weazel, a wild-haired friend of Watto at the podrace, was particularly fun for fans. "Hey, it's Wicket!" was probably said aloud at every screening for a while. However, *Episode II* and *Episode III* came and went without his involvement. Perhaps it was

his rising star power, thanks to his involvement with the Harry Potter franchise, or maybe his turn as the evil title character in the Leprechaun series of movies that kept him too busy for Star Wars. (Alright...maybe it was Harry Potter.)

Then the new movies began and that is when Warwick Davis in Star Wars became a thing. An absolutely, glorious, wonderful thing. The characters are almost too much to list, but let's try.

*The Force Awakens: Wolllivan, a denizen of Maz Kanata's castle*

*Rogue One: Weeteef Cyubee*

*The Last Jedi: Wodibin and Kedpin Shoklop*

*Star Wars Rebels: Ruhk*

*Solo: Weazel*

And those are just the listed roles. In *Solo* alone, he was at least two droids, a hamster-like creature congratulating Han at the Sabacc table, and who knows what else. His addition to the voice cast of *Star Wars Rebels*, playing fan favorite Thrawn bodyguard and assassin Ruhk, was standing-ovation-worthy news at Star Wars Celebration 2017 and *Solo* gave him his meatiest role on screen since Wicket, with the surprising return of Weazel, his character from *The Phantom Menace*. How Weazel goes from Tatooine thief to marauder for a cause is a story yet to be told, so fingers crossed we're going to get even more Weazel! All of these appearances speak to his versatile skills as a performer and it just feels right to have Warwick there.

Warwick Davis in Star Wars is as it should be. He has been an ambassador for the franchise for a long time. He is a staple at Fan Weekends and conventions, like those delightful Star Wars Celebrations where he also happens to be one of the best emcees around. Warwick was a fan of Star Wars before he got tapped to be a part of *Return of the Jedi* and the joy he had then still radiates from

him now, just as it did when he was the most beloved Ewok around. (Apologies to Paploo, of course.) If you've had the pleasure of seeing him around the conventions and hotel lobbies, you know one thing: He is a complete rock star to fans.

This, all that love and appreciation, began some years ago on the forest moon of Endor. Warwick's work as Wicket is no minor accomplishment. Consider this: As an eleven-year-old boy, Warwick was hired to be an extra, just another Ewok in the background. Then, the legendary Kenny Baker, his hands already full as R2-D2, got sick and couldn't play Wicket as planned. George Lucas, the legend now goes, liked what the young Warwick was doing as a background Ewok, so he moved him into the key role. Wicket's introduction with Leia had to establish the Ewoks for the audience. This was the first glance at the Endor natives that would help topple the Empire. Thrown into the scenario, opposite Carrie Fisher, with much of the third act of the movie hinging on his performance, young Warwick Davis delivered. And he hasn't stopped. Whether on screen or among the fans, Warwick Davis is a treasured part of the Star Wars galaxy.

Yub nub.

Yub nub indeed.

## 64

**CAD BANE ARRIVES****THE CLONE WARS'S GIFT TO BOUNTY  
HUNTING MAKES HIS MARK**

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Season 1, Episode 22, "Hostage Crisis"

Writers: Eoghan Mahony, Brian Larsen, & Drew Z Greenberg

Director: Giancarlo Volpe

*The Clone Wars* gave us an amazing number of memorable Star Wars morsels on the way to earning its prized place among fans. The deep cuts into Anakin's journey toward his true purpose, the expansion of Padmé Amidala's accomplishments, the layers of Obi-Wan Kenobi, the return of Maul, and the growth of Ahsoka into a truly inspirational and influential character are all part of the show's legacy. Yet, early on in its run, one of the series' biggest splashes was the debut of the wide-brimmed hat-wearing, six-gun shooting, Old West-inspired bounty hunter that was cold-stone deadly and uncompromisingly vicious. Cad Bane had arrived, and he brought with him a gaggle of bounty hunters (including cult fan-favorite Aurra Sing) on screen and created an even larger off-screen following of fans.

There are always lessons in Star Wars. Some you don't have to dig too deep for and others you have to ruminate on. They're around every corner. It's part of the fun and purpose of Star Wars. Yet, one should never underestimate the power of cool. Star Wars is also about being cool and there might not be anyone as cool in the Star Wars galaxy as Cad Bane.



Cool?

Yeah...cool.

The episodes of *The Clone Wars* are out of order. The reasons are too confusing for this book. So, if you watch the series in the chronological order, Cad Bane appears in six episodes before the episode titled “Hostage Crisis.” But if you watch them in the order they were released, “Hostage Crisis” serves as the fandom’s introduction to Bane and he comes exploding into the saga with a bold takeover of a Senate building on Coruscant. His team included the aforementioned Aurra Sing (a blink and you’ll miss her fan-favorite character in *The Phantom Menace*), a Weequay pirate, and an IG-86 series droid (invoking the popular IG-88 Bounty Hunter droid in *The Empire Strikes Back*.) It was an all-star team of scum and they weren’t playing games.

Oddly enough, at first glance, Bane’s character design is...silly... offbeat...almost too reminiscent of an Old West gunfighter. I recall watching the episode for the first time and immediately writing off the character as the story began. “He’s got a cowboy hat on,” I said aloud to no one as I was watching the show alone. “I mean, I can’t take him serious—oh. Oh, I see.” My thought was interrupted by Bane and his team killing an entire group of clone troopers. The stakes were raised...and they had my attention.

And that is the importance of Cad Bane in the history of *The Clone Wars* animated series. Star Wars fans were coming off the soul-challenging prequels and weren’t quite sure of what to make of this “Star Wars cartoon.” Especially considering it started rough with an ill-conceived theatrically released movie in 2008 that only cemented the doubts some Star Wars fans still harbored following *Episode I*, *Episode II*, and *Episode III*. It wasn’t entirely the show’s fault. A lot of us original trilogy era fans remembered the mid-80s animated

shows *droids* and *Ewoks*. They were unapologetically Saturday morning cartoon fare. They weren't to be taken seriously and had no place in the "true" Star Wars story. Though you could tell right away that *The Clone Wars* was aiming for something higher, Ahsoka (mostly referred to by her Anakin-given nickname Snips) was a little too precocious, Jar Jar was bumbling around, and the battle droids came off as a bad slapstick comedy improv troupe. Looking back, none of those moments are as egregious as first thought, but at that time—eeehhh—*The Clone Wars* hadn't taken a hold within the fandom.

Yet Cad Bane was a mercenary, a bounty hunter, and killing clone troopers with reckless abandon. Soon he was shooting a senator at point-blank range and taking many of the senators as hostages. It was real and dangerous. In subsequent episodes, Cad Bane tortured a Jedi to death and was part of Darth Sidious's plan to steal Force-sensitive children throughout the galaxy. Heavy stuff indeed.

The first season of *The Clone Wars* did a lot to establish the show's overarching desire to take a prominent place in the lore of the franchise. However, after twenty-one episodes, the big battles, political intrigue, and deeper digs into established characters had yet to get noticed. But, in the final episode of season one, Cad Bane made you sit up a little straighter in your seat. You leaned in a little closer to watch. This sharp-witted, cold-hearted bounty hunter was different than anything you had been watching, yet entirely familiar to the Star Wars galaxy you grew up daydreaming about. *The Clone Wars* now had an edge to it and was, you know, for the supposedly mature fans in the room, cool.

63

# WAR!

## THE BATTLE OF CORUSCANT

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

I love the opening moments of *Revenge of the Sith*.

There. I said it. It's out there. I love the Battle of Coruscant, and I stand by that.

Hopefully, it was easier for all of you to get to that point. Maybe you never had to “get to it” as you were there from the start. I envy you. I really do. There was no great aversion to it on my part, mind you. I just felt as though the sequence floated on the surface of things. It was a built-out version of the Battle of Yavin. George Lucas and his visual effects legions finally had all the toys in his sandbox, and this was the result. I just sort of skipped over it as a fan. Yet, with each viewing—may the Force keep being with the home media market—more layers and meanings started to emerge. A brutality to the action was revealed. A brotherhood was on display. And, suddenly, the Battle of Coruscant was every bit of Star Wars we love to consume.

What we have here is a dark thesis statement on the final chapter of George's Star Wars films. After telling the inspiring tale of self-discovery, hope, and the fight for freedom in the original trilogy,

he had turned his focus on the tale of self-destruction, fear, and the collapse of supposedly indestructible institutions. And, for this third chapter, he brought a PG-13 rating with him. Darkness was falling on the galaxy and it began with the pounding drums of John Williams' score. Already this sounded different.

The opening crawl had proclaimed "War!" and, sure enough, for the first time in the franchise (at this point in time), we actually started the story deep within a battle. The Jedi Starships flown by Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker roar past us, over the surface of a Republic capital ship, and take us into the action. It was all around us. It was loud and large. Everywhere you looked, there was violence.

An ARC-170 fighter explodes, and the bodies of clone troopers go flying past us and out into a cold death in space. We had seen beloved Rebel pilots die before, heard their screams, but there was something disturbingly graphic in the emotional distance to this death. We didn't have time to know these heroes, but too many of them were dying. Unknown fodder in a war waged by politicians.

We do know our Jedi, though, and our view of the full-scale conflict zeroes in on Kenobi and Skywalker. Side by side. Brothers in arms. This was before *The Clone Wars* animated series arrived to fill out their relationship and story. Yet, even with that series out there, this was the culmination of their collective journey that began with a simple meeting aboard a Nubian starship over a decade before (or 1999 for us at that time). Once a reluctant teacher and a fearful student, they had grown together, fought together, and become the most powerful dynamic duo in the galaxy. This was their final performance.

There are moments in the saga in which Anakin and Obi-Wan both talk about their great friendship and history. They acknowledge

the brotherhood that grew between and beyond their working relationship. We hear them talk about it, but, for me, this is all of that in action. The easy rapport, the in-sync nature of their combined fighting techniques, the inside jokes, and laughs despite the danger they always seem to find themselves in. It's all here. This is Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker at the peak of their connection.

Soon, they crash into General Grievous' command ship *The Invisible Hand* and we're off and running toward the rescue of Chancellor Palpatine and the rest of the story. We leave the battle behind. Yet, for those first glorious six minutes, we are wrapped in the full splendor of Star Wars. All those ingredients we love. Explosions, space ships fighting, R2-D2 zapping evil droids, and the fate of the galaxy all served up with heathy doses of the lore, characters, and lessons we crave.

And I missed it all the first time around.

Star Wars is a lot like a popular chain restaurant. I mean, everyone loves eating at Star Wars. So many options, so much to love, yet not every item on the menu is for everyone. It is, though, full of classic meals we all keep ordering over and over because they are truly the best. Yet, every so often, you need to peruse the rest of the menu. The Battle of Coruscant has everything you're looking for. The score, the characters, the stakes, and every fun, juicy moment of action that pulled you in all those years ago can be found here, high above the capital of the galaxy. You just have to slow yourself down and watch it. You have to order something new on the menu.

62

## CAPE!

### THE FASHION STATEMENT OF THE GALAXY

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan, & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

Darth Vader has one. So does Director Orson Krennic and Captain Phasma. Same for Count Dooku and General Grievous. Padmé owned one and so did her Senatorial buddy Bail Organa. And, of course, Lando Calrissian had many. And that's just some of the characters on the big screen. You want to know one of the most important ingredients in *Star Wars*? One of the little details that adds flavor to the galaxy, helping to define the in-story world of fashion while striking a chord in the real-world fandom that just can't quite commit to being that fashion forward? It's capes.

Lots and lots of capes.

Darth Vader might have set the tone when he strode on into *A New Hope* with his dark black cape flowing in the evil breeze behind him, but it was Lando Calrissian, Baron Administrator of Cloud City, friend (or was it foe?) of Han Solo, and all around trendsetter that showed up in *The Empire Strikes Back* and absolutely raised the bar for how to wear a cape in *Star Wars*.

Now, let's be clear, the character of Lando Calrissian is far more than just his capes. He's a forgiving and, when pressed, loyal friend, he's a skilled pilot and a future leader in the Rebellion.

The character of Lando and the sauntering presence of Billy Dee Williams helped expand the franchise, following the wild success of the first film, and made the galaxy a more robust and diverse place. He **also** just happened to change the face of fashion in the franchise.

As Han and Chewbacca led a dubious Leia and Threepio into Cloud City to meet their old “friend,” we’re all receiving a lot of mixed signals. There is a history there, and Han proclaims he’s got no love for the Empire, but the whispers between Han and Chewie only create more questions. As an audience, we don’t know what to expect. Then Lando strolls out onto the walkway of landing platform 327, his security entourage behind him, and one of the first images we see of him is one for the ages: charging up to Han Solo, hands on his hips, as his glorious cape flows in the Beshpin wind.

This Lando guy has something.

The image is strikingly different than the one Darth Vader presented in *A New Hope*. Vader’s cape IS magnificent, though, as it brings to mind the menacing visage of a classic monster movie villain. (Dracula is in space and he ain’t happy!) Subsequent Star Wars villains continue to strike that tone.

Count Dooku, played by the monster movie legend Dracula himself Christopher Lee, had another classic cape. Regal and intimidating at once, Dooku was one with his cape, flowing out of it like his hidden Sith Lord soul. Other villains have donned capes in an effort to add that extra layer of perceived power. General Grievous used his cape to collect lightsabers from Jedi that died by his hands. Captain Phasma coldly called for the execution of innocent Tuanal villagers in *The Force Awakens* while offsetting her stunning silver-plated armor with a black cape with blood red trim. Director Orson Krennic used his cape as an attempt to add to his self-constructed

image of feared Imperial leader. It didn't work in the end, but he did look good dying alone and powerless. Yes, capes are a key part of being bad in the Star Wars world, but the fun doesn't stop there.

*Solo: A Star Wars Story* is an absolute ode to capes in the galaxy far, far away. Dryden Vos wears his sleek black cape like the previous Star Wars baddies, but the fun doesn't stop there. Enfys Nest's fur lined cape is gloriously rebellious, setting a new trend for marauders everywhere. Qi'ra, always calculating and a step ahead, pauses to enjoy Lando's fine cape collection and even uses one of his custom pieces as the final ingredient in the trickery used to gain access to the spice mines on Kessel.

And what of that Lando Cape Collection? (Seriously, Lucasfilm just needs to license a line of capes for us to wear in this galaxy.) It is glorious, beautiful, and impressive. The younger version of Lando Calrissian matches Donald Glover's style and unapologetically leans into the appreciation and importance of capes in Star Wars. The colors, the styles, the variations, the grandeur. It's as if the center of the Star Wars cape universe is right there on the *Millennium Falcon*. As it should be. Capes and Star Wars go hand in hand. Something we first realized when Lando strolled out onto that landing platform to greet an old friend, his cape, and legacy, proudly flowing in the wind.



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# **IDEN VERSIO: THE COLLAPSE OF THE FAMILY BUSINESS**

## **HOW A VIDEO GAME CHARACTER TOOK HER RIGHTFUL PLACE IN STAR WARS**

*Star Wars Battlefront II*

Writers: Walt Williams & Mitch Dyer

The classic Star Wars arcade game was my first experience with a video game set inside this world. Dropping quarter after quarter into the machine, I, like so many others of that generation, would look past the simple wire framed graphics and let my imagination take me into Death Star trench run. I was there. In the movie. Helping Luke Skywalker take down the Empire. Since then, the games have only gotten bigger and better and the wide variety of Star Wars video games throughout the ages have brought us all great stories and characters. Your first memories might be the eight-bit Atari version of *The Empire Strikes Back* or the groundbreaking *Shadows of the Empire* on the Nintendo 64, but the appeal and promise of that first arcade game remained. We all want to feel like we're part of the Star Wars story.

In 2015, the *Star Wars Battlefront* video game franchise was rebooted and, oddly enough, despite being absolutely gorgeous and making you feel like you were actually being IN battles, it wasn't enough for the fans. The demands of video game audiences have grown and

matured since my friends and I spent most of our allowance flying the technological equivalent of a stick figure into a space battle. Fans wanted a fully functional story mode. However, when word came that the sequel, *Battlefront II*, was going to have a story mode and that story was going to be a part of official Star Wars canon, there were some raised eyebrows. In this new age of canon, with more emphasis put on the who, the why, and the where of Star Wars storytelling, you had to wonder if a video game could truly find its place in the Star Wars saga.

I mean, seriously, can we all just stop for a second and acknowledge how hard it is to make us Star Wars fans happy sometimes?

It's understandable, though. In this modern age of Star Wars, the word canon means...well...everything to a lot of fans. (Or some fans. Let's not wag too wide of a finger here.) Perhaps too much. While canon should never come before the importance of a good story, you can't deny that part of the fun of being a Star Wars fan is knowing where the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. The danger is that too many pieces get tossed onto the table. That was the big challenge for Star Wars *Battlefront II* and the writers of the story, Walt Williams and Mitch Dyer. Could they create a story and main character that perfectly fit into the Star Wars universe?

Simple.

No problem.

Then we met Iden Versio as played by Janina Gavankar, leader of the Inferno Squad, an elite Imperial strike force. Dressed in imposing black and entering the Battle of Endor, she was front and center at a major moment in Star Wars. While the gears in your fan brain are churning, trying to figure out if you really like the concept of previously unknown elite Imperials running around

your precious Battle of Endor, it happens. The second Death Star explodes. A watershed moment in Star Wars...except, this time, we are watching it from the eyes of Iden Versio. As the Empire's vaunted second superweapon explodes above the planet, there is a perspective-shattering grimace on Iden's face, a deep realization followed by a denial of this new truth. Iden can't help but look at the Empire in a new light. They weren't supposed to lose, but they did, and, before it was all said and done, Iden would help finish the job.

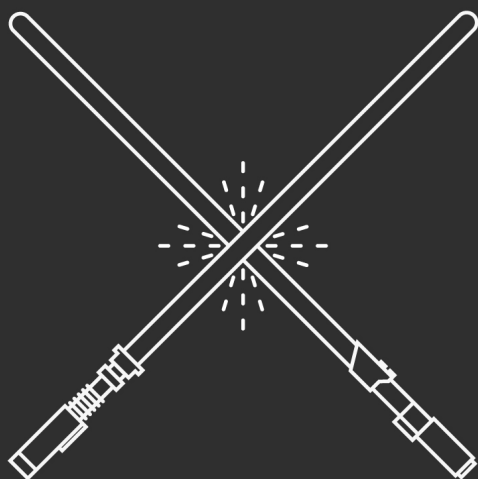
She was born into the Empire on the planet Vardos. Her father, Garrick, was an important Imperial officer. Her artist mother used her immense talent to create Imperial propaganda. She was raised to believe in what the Empire stood for on the surface, but she grew to learn the truth and joined the Rebellion. She did everything in her power to take down the Empire and, in a way, helped tear down the family business.

As the story of Iden evolves—meaning as you play through the adventure in the comfort of your own home—we get to deal with some big concepts. Iden doesn't just “believe” in the Empire. It is a literal way of life. Her only existence. Though her mother has passed away, her connection to her strict and distant father comes through her service to their Empire. While the father-son dynamic is often explored in Star Wars to great success, it's nice to spend more time with the father-daughter dynamic. (For more on Iden's mother, check out Christie Golden's tie-in novel *Star Wars: Battlefront II: Inferno Squad*.) Iden's relationship with the Empire crumbles just as she learns the sad truth of her father. He's ordered an attack on their home world in keeping with the Emperor's last orders. She turns. Now in open rebellion to the Empire as well as her father and family history. It also represents a valuable lesson

for all of us: Can you change when a lifetime of beliefs leads you to unforeseen revelations? Can you grow?

Like Luke Skywalker before her, Iden's journey seems like vengeance against her own father, but it turns into a mission of redemption. Her last moments with her father happen aboard his Star Destroyer. She's there to rescue him. Wanting to save him from the moment, yes, but also to bring him with her into a new way of thinking. He refuses. Not just out of loyalty to a fast fading regime, but because he knows he doesn't deserve it. Iden had once looked up at an exploding Death Star and realized not everything was as she thought. As he says, "You saw the Empire's weakness and refused to let it consume you." It made her stronger. Iden's reaction comes from the gut, believing her father deserves better than this. Garrick flatly disagrees. She deserves to live and sends his daughter on her way. Garrick Versio is not to be redeemed, but, today, Iden Versio is. His final words to her are, "Go. Survive. Live."

This is a cutscene in a video game. Something that plays while you wait for your next mission or level. But it has emerged as one of the better emotional moments in Star Wars. All of Star Wars. We're a long way from the arcades of the past, plunking in all your change, so you can just feel like you're part of the Star Wars story. Now, you are the story.



## INTERLUDE #2

### THE FIRST STEP INTO A LARGER WORLD...

Two young girls passed through the large convention center doors and walked onto the floor of the Las Vegas Comic Con. It was March 2016 and *The Force Awakens* had just reignited a fanbase and, more importantly, brought new ones into the fold. I was off to the side, both leading the way and trying to very much stay out of it, and the girl's mother, my cousin Michelle, was trying to do the same. As we passed the threshold into the convention, the girl's eyes widen. Maggie, ten, dressed as Kylo Ren, and Madeline, nine, dressed as Rey, gazed out on the waves and waves of vendor booths, collector displays, creative cosplayers, and, just simply, fans. Families, friends, strangers. All of them connected by a love of stories, movies, characters, costumes, and little plastic pieces of their memories and inspirations. Maggie and Madeline both smiled in their Star Wars costumes and literally took their first steps into a large world.

Star Wars is a magnificent world to be a part of. Overall fandom is as well, which makes those conventions so much fun, but Star Wars has that extra special feeling of community and connection. Even in these loud, raucous times where social media can amplify the worst in every group, the core of the Star Wars community will always be built on the shared joy of stepping into that larger world. Its core is stronger than the negative forces that crash against it. I believe that comes from that flame of fandom we all light that very first time. At first, it is a small candle you have lit by yourself. You're not sure if others love this with the same fervor as you do. You're not sure if you're *supposed* to love it with the fervor you do. Some were told you can't love it. Then, the doors open up to the entire breadth of

the Star Wars fandom and make that connection stronger. It makes it unbreakable.

As the franchise continues to grow and the nostalgia trade along with it, it can be a little easier to take the whole thing for granted. The characters and stories have rolled out in front of your eyes for so long and you've spent so much of your time wondering what it all means and breaking down every piece of information, that one can't be considered wrong for just wanting to take a breath or a step back. I understand. I've been there as well. But none of that erases the first step *you* took toward Star Wars. That love is always there.

Star Wars is best analyzed, appreciated, and understood by adults. However, Star Wars is best loved by children. Sometimes you have to go back to that. As I watched Maggie stride through the convention as Kylo Ren, cape menacingly flowing behind her in the wind, and Madeline beaming as Rey, lightsaber proudly at her side, I was reminded, once again, of the first moments we all looked at the world of Star Wars and realized we belonged there.

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## **“BEGUN, THESE CLONE WARS HAVE...”**

### **THE HARSH BEAUTY AND LESSONS OF THE BATTLE OF GEONOSIS**

*Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*

Writers: George Lucas & Jonathan Hales

Director: George Lucas

I know I wasn't supposed to like *Attack of the Clones* when I walked out of the movie theater. This was May 16, 2002 after all and the loud mob of Star Wars fans had decided, apparently collectively, that we didn't like the prequels. “Thanks for trying, George Lucas,” said the loud mob. “But this wasn't what we wanted as fans. Boo and hiss, sir. Boo and hiss.” Yet, as I walked with my friend toward our cars, I just couldn't get the Battle of Geonosis out of my mind. There was something about that battle that just stayed with me. A harsh beauty among the ugliness of war.

George Lucas has never shied away from his feelings of war, specifically Vietnam, while giving the world their beloved Star Wars. The Battle of Endor was a comment on it, Yoda preached about wars not making one great, and, in the end, Luke threw down his weapon in front of the Emperor, choosing the true Jedi path. Yep, George Lucas has some thoughts on war. Yet, throughout these movies, George and the creative forces working with him, gave us



some memorable war sequences. Pulse-pounding action, tension-inducing ticking time bombs, and breathtaking visuals at odds with the very message behind it all. It's the delicate balance of Star Wars.

The Battle of Geonosis that closes *Attack of the Clones* serves these two purposes well. Should the Jedi have been involved in this war? Should they have taken rank and led these clone armies? Hindsight is twenty-twenty, even for the insightful Jedi. All of their visions of the always-in-motion future couldn't pull them away from this conflict. It starts as a rescue, really, but rapidly devolves into the start of the Clone War. Sometimes war is inevitable, but maybe the Jedi should have answered those questions for themselves before jumping into action? This battle and the war that follows does lead to the demise of the Jedi. Maybe they had no choice? The war was here.

However, once the battle actually begins, those deep thoughts give way to the type of action we all crave as fans. And THAT was what was lingering in my brain when I walked out. Ever since that hologram of Princess Leia said, "Years ago you served my father in the Clone Wars..." we've all dreamed about what that was. Well, here it was, finally. And while I personally had some questions about what I had just watched, looking at you C-3PO on a battle droid, I turned to my friend and said, "I kinda want to go back to elementary school and play Star Wars during recess."

And that's why the battle works.

George Lucas took us to the ground floor of the battle. It's overwhelming and manic. Awash with myriad lightsabers and laser blasts. The Jedi fight battle droids, Geonosians, and stampeding creatures before the clones arrive and the battle expands from the Petranaki Arena to the planet's surface, growing in size and scope. Within this battle are some of the most captivating images

of war in Star Wars. We watch from above as the surviving Jedi are surrounded by droids. Boba Fett silently grabs his slain father's helmet and holds it to his forehead. A LAAT-series gunship reloads its weapons and whirs into battle. The clone troopers fire into a tidal wave of debris, sand, and droids, a striking image of the chaos of war. Freeze any one of these moments and you have a piece of Star Wars art worthy of a frame. And every one of these beats has something in common. This is the type of battle you would act out as a kid. Whether you gathered all your friends or all your action figures, or in most cases, both, these are the types of Star Wars battles we didn't just dream about, we created them.

Yet those bigger themes and lessons remain just beneath the surface of those images and action. This battle rapidly grows out of control like the war soon will. Stampeding over the galaxy. Boba Fett will soon spin off into the notorious underworld. The clones will be continuously thrown against that chaotic tidal wave. The Jedi will collapse from within. Cause and effect. Cause and effect. As I walked away from the theater yearning to be part of the action, deeper thoughts were building up within me. Once again, George Lucas was pulling us all in, striking a chord in our imagination, and using that to remind us that there is always something to ponder while you're captivated by Star Wars. Yoda was right. Wars not make one great—even if they do look beautiful.

# KYLO UNCHAINED

## A VILLAIN KILLS HIS PAST

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

Kylo Ren just wanted to be himself.

Born to two heroes of the Rebellion, sent off to train with a legend, and burdened with a legacy of evil, Ben Solo had a lot to live up to on the road to becoming Kylo Ren. Everything about the past hung over his every move. It was a recipe for disaster. The confusion, neglect, isolation, and rage flowed violently into his soul and turned it all to fear. Fear of who he was supposed to be. Fear of not becoming who he could be. Fear of not being who he wanted to be. Now, here he was, in his master's throne room. Rey, the only person he felt knew every truth inside of him, was now before him about to die as his master Snoke brazenly claimed to have control over his will. Kylo Ren stood there with a weapon and only one choice. Become unchained.

The throne room sequence in *The Last Jedi* is a story unto itself but, at its center, is the moment in which Kylo Ren truly became the villain of the story by spinning everything about him onto an unpredictable path. Gone was the dark side dynamic of master and apprentice. Gone was the evil leader whose primary concern is to use his military might to rule the galaxy. Gone was the conflicted

soul of the one once known as Ben Solo. What remains is Kylo Ren with no restrictions or legacies to shadow his life. He can pursue whatever he wants.

And what he wants just might be to tear it all down. Everything. Every person. Every army. Every planet. Every society. Every hero that blocks his way. Everything that would dare to remind him of what he was and what he was supposed to be.

Supreme Leader Snoke wanted Kylo Ren to fulfill his destiny, but that was just a lie. A sales pitch to pull him in, mold him, and use him to do his bidding. Snoke had his own self in mind. But that's the dark side, right? Power and manipulation. Kylo Ren certainly worshipped the memory of his grandfather and Snoke knew how to dangle that out in front of him like a brass ring he would never get. The heir apparent to Lord Vader? Sure, Kylo liked the sound of that, but he had always wrestled with the shadow of Vader and had clearly learned that Snoke only saw him as boy playing the part. So, Snoke had to go.

Rey was there and her heart was pure. He knew that. Kylo felt that... or rather... Ben Solo felt that. They were connected, intimately intertwined, and that had power over him after years of feeling neglect. First it was by a father who struggled with the transition from hot shot hero to parent and a loving mother still feeling the weight and responsibility of leadership. Then by his legendary uncle who sensed the dark side bubbling up inside him and failed to save him. Snoke even neglected Ben Solo, helping him to turn his back on his self. But here was Rey, standing before him, asking for him to join her, and using the name Ben. Kylo no longer wanted Ben here. So, Rey had to go.

Oh, he offered his hand out to her. He wanted Rey to join him, but if she had accepted that offer, Rey would no longer be there. She

would have become someone else. No Sith. No Jedi. No Skywalker. No Rebels. No past. The new order Kylo Ren wanted to bring to the galaxy was unchained from anything that had helped torment him.

Going into this throne room sequence, there were a lot of expectations and theories about what we felt should happen. There were a lot of things ingrained into the way we were used to these stories being told. Yet, when the fires subsided, the smoke cleared, and the bodies dropped, the one thing that emerged was a powerful villain with nothing to stop him from being the monster he wanted to be.

Ben Solo was finally Kylo Ren.

# VADER RECALLS AHSOKA

## AN ONSCREEN LEGEND REMEMBERS AN ANIMATED FAVORITE

*Star Wars: Lords of the Sith*

Author: Paul S. Kemp

Ahsoka Tano is one of the most popular characters in Star Wars, an inspirational influence for an entire generation of fans whose entry point into the franchise was *The Clone Wars* animated series. Important in her own right with some of the best arcs and moments in the series, she was also key to the maturation of Anakin Skywalker. She, though, like the series she starred in, got off to a rough start. 2008's theatrically released *The Clone Wars* movie was not well received. Ahsoka was a tad too precocious for some and brought with her cute nicknames like Artooey for R2 and Stinky for Jabba's son Rotta. (Small, petty crimes made bigger by an older, grumpier fanbase. How could the man who would become Vader call her "Snips!" \*fist shaking\*) But one of the biggest questions fueling the cynical gaze at Ahsoka was "where was she by the time *Revenge of the Sith* started?" Cynicism aside, it's a fair question. One that didn't necessarily fade when Ahsoka grew into the unilaterally loved character. How does Ahsoka connect to the movies?

By the events of *Revenge of the Sith* she's not mentioned once. And when Darth Vader strolls into *A New Hope*, do we really believe he spent three years of his life fighting alongside her? So, alright, yes, this question willingly sidesteps the reality that Ahsoka Tano was

created by Dave Filoni and *The Clone Wars* team decades after *A New Hope* and just shortly after *Episode III*. That's the real answer, but, you know, not a fun one and not even a reason fans will accept. If you're going to introduce an important character in television shows, books, and comics that have an effect on the characters we've met on screen, we want to know how they connect. We're just that demanding.

Ahsoka Tano does end up connecting with the story of Darth Vader in a grand way. The second season of *Star Wars Rebels* gives us a confrontation worth discussing further. However, there had to be a first time and the first time had to really hit home. And in the modern age of Star Wars canon, the first one to try was author Paul S Kemp in his vastly underrated novel *Lords of the Sith*.

Set eight years after the *beginning* of the Clone Wars and featuring fan-favorite Ryloth Rebel Cham Syndulla, the main story of the novel centers around the continuing trials of Darth Vader, now five years into his second life as Palpatine's twisted apprentice. Their relationship is—and always will remain—a complicated one, which is an additional victory for Kemp in this story. This book was released in April 2015 and helped establish the constant struggle between Vader and his master that was later fleshed out in two Vader-centric comic books and novels. Kemp helped set that tone. Just as he set the tone for the eventual showdown between Ahsoka and Vader.

As Vader, the Emperor, and an attachment of Imperial Royal Guards crash toward the surface of Ryloth in an Imperial shuttle, Vader is in the pilot's seat and chaos is around him. As the ship tumbles toward a potentially fatal end, Vader calms himself in the Force and is confronted by memories of past. Memories of Obi-Wan Kenobi, Mace Windu, Plo Koon, and his beloved Padmé—all of them reaching out and challenging Vader in his current state of

emotional torment. The first one, though, was a memory from his last time above Ryloth, lost in an escape pod during the Clone Wars (an event found in the season one episode “Storm over Ryloth”). A name breaks through to his soul.

Ahsoka.

Kemp then boldly follows that up with the nickname that once troubled a fanbase.

“Snips.”

There it is. This is the moment Ahsoka fans have been waiting for. There is pain attached to the memory of Ahsoka for Vader. It is in a far corner of his mind that he does not want to travel to. Vader is still at war, fighting Palpatine, fighting his memories, and fighting Anakin himself. The moment isn’t awkward or clumsy. It’s not wedged in. It is an organic connection between the onscreen legend and the animated superstar. Darth Vader remembers Ahsoka.

Why is this important? Why is this a reason we love Star Wars? Because this made it possible for what would later happen between them in *Star Wars Rebels*. This is the first moment that Ahsoka fans—correction—WE Ahsoka fans, for I very much am one—can point at and say she matters. Ahsoka Tano is not just a character relegated to an animated corner of Star Wars. It made you stop reading, take a breath, and revel in the fact that there was more to come with Ahsoka. This small moment in a book released at the beginning of a tidal wave of new canon speaks to the importance of being able to see and feel the connection between characters we fall in love with in the movie theater and the ones we meet in the rest of the canon material. It makes it a more robust galaxy and should give hope to fans of characters like Rae Sloane, Doctor Aphra, Sana Starros, Sinjir Rath Velus, and the many exciting characters that



dot the landscape of the larger Star Wars universe. They didn't just impact you, they are impacting the story.

In April 2015, all eyes were on every word in these new shows, books, and comics. A new era of connected canon had been launched and the fans wanted answers. Before Ahsoka returned to face Vader, before E.K. Johnston's *Ahsoka* novel, before she went off to search for Ezra Bridger, Paul S Kemp broke through the barrier and let us know that one of the most beloved characters had her rightful place in the galaxy we already knew.

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## PAIGE TICO

### THE INSPIRING FACE OF SACRIFICE

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

Death is an important part of the Star Wars story. The cost of the war often felt most strongly by the Republic, Rebellion, and Resistance is never shied away from, but, in *The Last Jedi*, the toll of these deaths, past and present, is explored in detail. Painful, up close detail. We learn this very early on, with the death and sacrifice of Resistance bomber gunner Paige Tico. A haunting yet inspirational poem found within the bombastic cacophony of war.

Paige Tico, who we soon learn is the sister of hero-to-be Rose, is a small cog in the bigger Resistance wheel. She joined the Resistance with her sister after seeing firsthand what the rising evil of the First Order was doing. Though a skilled pilot herself, she mostly serves as a gunner, watching the galaxy flow out in front of her while sitting cramped up in the belly gun of the hulking MG-100 StarFortress Bomber known as the *Cobalt Hammer*. Paige Tico had no eyes on being heroic, she just wanted to do her part. It's a tried and true archetype, especially in Star Wars. But never before have we seen the sacrifice this close.

Rian Johnson starts this Star Wars movie with something we fans all love and, if we're being honest, crave: an intense battle full of

captivating sounds, mesmerizing blasts, and intense action. With a dual look at the inner workings of the First Order's in-fighting leadership and the brazenness of Poe Dameron and the Resistance striking hard while also escaping, the opening battle over D'Qar was a fantastic way to start this chapter of the saga. Simply put there are some awe-inspiring images early on and the echoes of World War II movies and newsreel footage of B-17 bombing runs are certainly intended and felt. As you settle into your seat, appreciating the wonderful "Star Wars-ness" of it all, something changes. An exploding TIE fighter crashes into a Resistance bomber just as it's about to drop his payload. Fire races through the ship and the bombardier turns to watch as the force of the impending explosion rips apart his vessel. The debris takes down the bombers next to it and now we know something is different in this Star Wars battle. Harkening back to a chilling sequence in the 1990 movie *Memphis Belle* when our point-of-view servicemen watch and listen as another US plane is ripped in two and sent crashing back down to Earth, we are now watching the carnage through the eyes of Paige Tico.

Veronica Ngo portrays Paige Tico and with only a few minutes of screen time, she registers a memorable performance. She goes from panicked and traumatized to dutiful and brave in just a few, heart-wrenching, tense sequences. Many can identify with her initial reaction. Trained, prepared, and believing in both the routine and purpose of the task at hand, nothing could have prepared Paige for what she witnesses: the violence, the chaos, and the loss of life. It's all very real and the weight of that is reflected in her eyes and on her face. Whether it's during an emergency event or a situation in life you never thought you'd ever have to face, we all have that moment of disbelief. We all have said, "This isn't really happening."

But it is and Paige Tico is still at war. She's still fighting. She's still alive.

There is inspiration to be found in what comes next for Paige. Poe calls out to her and she snaps back into reality. Paige Tico, not a Jedi, not a superhero, just a gunner doing her job, looks at the horror around her, the obstacles in front of her, and does what she is supposed to do. The connection is real. Through the dark times of our own lives, we, too, shriek back into a daze. "This isn't really happening" easily turns into "I can't do this." Yet like Paige at this moment, you will click in as well. You will keep going.

Paige climbs up the bomber's ladder and is literally knocked back down again, flat on her back. When her eyes open, she's even farther away from her task than she was before. So begins the final stanza of this poem. Rian Johnson takes us into a series of slow-motion screams of both the Resistance and First Order, her bomber—now the last hope for everyone's survival—approaches its target, General Leia closes her eyes in anticipation of a possible end, and Paige grabs her medallion and takes one last memory of her sister before a final kick to bring down the device. With a music swell worthy of the final act of any movie, Paige succeeds.

This is absolutely a Star Wars hero moment. The simple gunner overcame the odds, both within and without, to save the day. A lifetime of Star Wars lessons has taught us that this is what heroes do, but this time it's different. Paige closes her eyes as the *Cobalt Hammer* falls into the exploding dreadnaught. She'll never see her sister again. She'll just be a name in the history books. This is a harsh reminder of the sacrifice of war. One that is needed for the survival of the Resistance at that moment yet part of a series of losses that weigh heavily on those left behind. And that is the second half of the inspiration. As *The Last Jedi* continues, Rose Tico fights on for the greater cause and stated theme of saving what

we love, but her motivation for survival is the face of her sister.  
Rose goes on for her and we fight so that others will not have to in  
the future.

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## THE DUCHESS AND THE PADAWAN

### LOVE AND LOSS IN THE TIME OF (THE CLONE) WAR

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Season 5, episode 16, “The Lawless”

Writer: Chris Collins

Director: Brian Kallen O’Connell

Romance certainly has its place in Star Wars. It never ends well, though, but we keep falling for it. Whether it be the opposite attracts bickering banter of Han and Leia, the idealistic Shakespearean-like youthful passion with no boundaries of Thane Kyrell and Ciena Ree, or the forbidden, ill-fated love of Anakin and Padmé, we invest in the grand sweeping nature of these storybook-love affairs, only to be hurt time and time again. So, when *The Clone Wars* animated series revealed a grand love in Obi-Wan Kenobi’s past and brought him face-to-face with the simmering heat of that dangerous passion, we should have known better. We should have been prepared. Yet when Duchess Satine Kryze of Mandalore died in the arms of Kenobi, murdered by his rival Maul and confessing her long-held love with her last words, we found ourselves in a familiar spot: heart broken and better for it.

Duchess Satine and Obi-Wan had first met when they were young. As a Padawan, Kenobi and his master Qui-Gon Jinn were tasked

with protecting her. On the run for over a year, the Duchess and the Padawan found comfort in each other. Delicious and tantalizing comfort. This was certainly shaping up to be one hell of a sweeping romance. They kind we love in Star Wars.

That's why this one hurt so much. Once it became apparent that the often stoic and responsibly rigid Obi-Wan Kenobi had a long-held love for this vibrant, insightful leader, we wanted their love to work. We wanted it to happen even if we knew all along that it couldn't. With her well-earned accomplishments, bold leadership in troubled times, and thought-provoking beliefs, there was enough for fans to give Satine their attention outside of this romantic tale, but we knew that Satine was the perfect match for Kenobi. She made him better while creating for herself a legacy that cannot be undervalued.

Before the Clone Wars, Satine took over the rule of Mandalore and refused to go along with the violent ways of her culture. Mandalorians were raised for generation after generation to crave war, believe in violence, but Satine didn't just want a better way. She led her people there. She was a pacifist in a galaxy at war. Which, of course, was an admirable philosophical stand that created enemies within and put her at odds with—of all people—the Jedi.

The Jedi were at war now, you see. Generals leading clone armies. One had to question whether they were fighting because they had to or because they wanted to. Obedient and brave, General Kenobi believed everything the Jedi did was to protect democracy and fight evil. Hard to disagree with that, but Duchess Satine directly challenged that notion and made Kenobi rethink his views of the Jedi. Naturally, he should fall in love with her. There was a lot for him to learn from her.

After years apart and out of communication, their destinies became intertwined once again, thanks to the raging Clone War, but, sadly, this time, there was an interloper: that ball of rage and vengeance that was Darth Maul (now just Maul). The former Sith apprentice could never leave behind his all-consuming hatred for Obi-Wan Kenobi. He took Mandalore with his brother Savage Opress at his side and had power, allies, an army, even the legendary Darksaber, but all that paled in comparison to what he really wanted to do: destroy Kenobi. So, he used Satine as bait and Kenobi took it because he had to. There was no other way.

How romantic.

How tragically romantic.

It was no small measure that Kenobi tried to rescue her. The mission and bigger picture always come first for him because that's what the Jedi want. However, Satine's safety was not part of that picture. The Jedi were not going to come sweeping in to save the day. The same Jedi Master who once told Anakin to leave Padmé behind over the rolling dunes of Geonosis, so they could fight Count Dooku, was now faced with having to do the same thing for the person he loved. Years of training, discipline, and belief had now run straight into unbridled love and passion.

It was Obi-Wan Kenobi's heart versus everything he was trained to do.

He defied orders and snuck off to save her. Not for duty. Not for the Republic. Not for the Jedi. This was for him. This was for Satine. A defiant act for love.

Obi-Wan Kenobi, we learn, would have left the Jedi Order for her. He claims she only had to ask. That's a huge revelation. Whether



you first met him as Old Ben Kenobi living out beyond the Jundland Wastes or as a younger, dashing knight in the middle of war, he was always the classic Jedi. He toed the line, followed orders, and stringently adhered to all of his learned codes and beliefs. He spent twenty years in isolation dutifully guarding Luke Skywalker. But for Satine, he would have turned away from all of it. However, she never asked, and he never left. They both lived lives centered around service to others and it kept them apart until the very end. Maul, his blood boiling with revenge, brutally killed her in front of him, plunging that Darksaber into her heart. The collective breath of the fandom was taken away, removed from our very beings with a guttural gasp as Satine's final confession of love found Obi-Wan's ears and heart. Star Wars romance had done it to us again.

Yet, the tragic tale of Duchess Satine and Obi-Wan Kenobi remains as one of the more beloved romances in the franchise. It added layers to a classic character often thought to just be quietly waiting in the wings for his return to the story. It gave us an inspiring leader that changed a culture. It gave us two people that could never be together because they pursued purpose over self. Romance does have an important place in Star Wars and even though we always seem to know how sad it's going to end, like Satine and Obi-Wan, we hold onto those brief moments of love and know that it was worth it.

# RACING THROUGH ENDOR

## THE ALLURE OF THE SPEEDER BIKE SEQUENCE

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: George Lucas & Lawrence Kasdan

Director: Richard Marquand

George Lucas loves fast moving things. In real life and in films. An aspiring race car driver in his youth, he survived a near-fatal car accident at eighteen years of age and turned to filmmaking as a career choice. George, though, never left his need for speed behind. Whether it was drag races in *American Graffiti*, Death Star trench runs, podraces, and, the favorite of a generation, the speeder bike sequence in *Return of the Jedi*.

The 74-Z speeder bike itself is such a sublime design. It's a space motorcycle. It takes two seconds for even the youngest of fans to get that. So, once you grasp *what* it is, particularly if you're a seven-year-old kid sitting in a theater, on, say, random date, May 25, 1983, you want to see it in action. And, whoa, see it in action we do. The Rebels land on Endor and our heroes immediately steal some speeder bikes to chase after the bad guys, and so begins one of the best sequences in *Star Wars*.

The legacy of the speeder bike chase extends to many different categories. The look and feel of the sequence are the first thing that grabs you. It's different than the higher intensity moments

that came before it. The action in *A New Hope* is mostly focused in space. Sure, there are blaster fights and a lightsaber battle among the halls of the Death Star, but the lumps in our throat are generally the biggest when we're flying among the stars. *The Empire Strikes Back* had the up close and personal tension of Vader and Luke and an epic sprawling battle in the snow. But in *Return of the Jedi*, here we are, on a forest planet for the first time, and the chase through the forest floor is fresh and rife with high-stakes tension. One false move and you're dead, smashed into exploding pieces against a redwood tree. You feel this chase.

On the technical side, it was pretty ingenious. By now, it's common behind-the-scenes Star Wars knowledge, but none of this should be forgotten. In April 1982, camera operator Garrett Brown walked with a VistaVision camera on a Steadicam through the forest floor in the very real Red Woods. Visual effects supervisor Dennis Muren and assistant cameraman Michael Owens are at his side as Brown slowly and painstakingly walks while filming at  $\frac{3}{4}$  speed. One slight move off course and they would have to do it again and again. The rig was heavy. The gear cumbersome. The film process was almost as intense as the sped up, hair-raising sequence it became. (You can read Brown's personal account of this on the American Society of Cinematographers website.) This footage was then mixed with real shots of the performers, green screens, matte paintings, and some good old-fashioned model making to create a technological masterpiece of its time.

The final presentation was a masterstroke of modern, blockbuster filmmaking. You are completely transported into the moment, which is probably the most important impact of the sequence. It enraptured its audience. The design of the bikes, the editing, and the unique sound the bikes (who hasn't made that screaming echo of the bikes zipping past you) and chase created make for a most

memorable four minutes of film. It doesn't hurt that the chase ends when Luke Skywalker, combat poncho and all, jumps off his bike mere seconds before it explodes against a tree and faces down a charging speeder bike-riding biker scout with his lightsaber. Deflecting three laser blasts and slicing the bike in two, Skywalker sends the final speeder bike, and the sequence, to a blinding, fiery end.

Now catch your breath.

We could talk often and write much about the deeper meanings and greater lessons found inside Star Wars. The franchise is, fortunately, bursting at the seams with them. Yet, we can never forget (because George never did) that this saga is also meant to entertain and delight us. This is why the speeder bike sequence reigns supreme. Whenever you first saw it, you couldn't get it out of your mind. You took it home with you.

There was a small palm tree in my backyard growing up. One of the branches leaned out at near ninety-degree angle, making it accessible for the tiny version of me. I could easily hop on and off the wayward branch. Who needed a fancy bike, expensive skateboard, or tree house? I had this branch and I used it for one thing—as a speeder bike. I'd climb on up, take my place on the “seat,” and I was off. Some days I was chasing down Imperial biker scouts as a Rebel helping Han, Luke, and Leia defeat the Empire. Other days I was one of the biker scouts—one of my favorite style of troopers in the whole damn Empire—chasing down Rebels and, dare I say, Ewoks. The sounds, the look, the feel, and, of course, the speed. In a franchise that brought us great space battles and electric lightsaber fights and a world of toys to help transport us to almost wherever you want to go in this galaxy, I wanted to zoom around the forest moon of Endor. Star Wars is about a lot of important, meaningful themes and lessons, but, sometimes, it's just about

being dazzled. First, when you see it, and, for the rest of your life, when you dream about it. Speed and tension: key ingredients to Star Wars. As George Lucas was known for saying on set, “Faster, more intense.”

# THE DEATH OF K-2SO

## CHOICE OVER PROGRAMMING

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

Moments after failing to convince the leaders of the Rebel Alliance to take the fight to the Empire on Scarif, Jyn Erso is joined by a small band of rogue rebels for a daring mission to steal the Death Star plans. Everyone is choosing to defy orders and join the mission, believing in Jyn's words that they have no choice but to fight. All but one that is. K-2SO, the straightforward, sardonic droid buddy of Cassian Andor, bluntly states that he is with Jyn as well...because Cassian made him. The droid didn't want to be there, he was ordered. And that was particularly hard for him to accept because he and Jyn didn't exactly get along. However, the death of K-2SO was perhaps the most emotionally tasking death in the movie. How it gets to that point is a lesson in choice over programming.

K-2SO was a KX-series security droid built to serve the Galactic Empire, until a chance meeting with Cassian on the planet Wecacoe forever changed him. While trying to arrest Cassian, he had most of his memory wiped clean. By the end of the encounter, Cassian and his cohorts have escaped with K-2SO at their side. K2 remained there and became the righthand droid for Andor and, like many droids, served in this war just as much as the organic lifeforms around him. However, also like many droids, their choice

to fight is often assumed to be a given. What they do in the battle is what's important.

Once on the surface of Scarif, Jyn, Cassian, and K-2SO infiltrated the highly fortified Citadel tower. It was there, deep within the Imperial research facility, that K-2SO made the most important choice of his existence. With the near-impossible mission on the brink of fatal failure, K-2SO stood his ground, fighting off stormtroopers and guiding Jyn and Cassian through the theft of the Death Star plans.

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* was always going to be about sacrifice. Yet, the theme of hope ran through the movie, so, as we got to know these new heroes, there was always the hope that they would survive. In the heat of the moment, though, we are caught up in the action and, perhaps, the false notion that everything in these stories works out just fine. It was not to be. The tide starts to turn for the worse with K-2SO.

As blast after blast from the stormtroopers' weapons begin to tear him apart, we start to fear the worst. He falls to his knees, taking more damage. There is a frailty in his voice, something not usually heard in the voice of a droid, as he barks out the next steps for Cassian and Jyn. They can climb to the top of the tower and transmit the plans. It dawns on Cassian Andor just as it dawns on us: K-2SO is about to die. His final word is "goodbye."

It's a simple but vivid choice. We're used to droids beeping and gonking. We're accustomed to the stiffness of a protocol droid, the metallic distance of a service droid, or even the bumbling bumbles of a battle droid. But, here now, K-2SO's words are nothing short of pained and they strike a chord within us.

K2 knew what had to be done for the survival of the mission, the coming war, and, above all, his friends. He needed to lay down his life so the mission could go on. This action was not based on any programming or orders. Nothing predetermined played into the decision. It was his decision and his alone. K-2SO chose to sacrifice himself for the cause and his death was a signpost of what was about to come.

As the light in K-2SO's eyes fades away and we leave him dying on the floor of a faraway facility that will soon be destroyed, he is no longer just a droid. K-2SO is a testament to the power of looking beyond your past, your upbringing, your environment, your expectations and seeing the truth of the moment you are in. K-2SO died because, perhaps for the first time in his existence, he chose to do something not expected of him for the benefit of others. One by one the other heroes of this story fall in a similar fashion. Each a lesson in choice over programming. Let's give a salute to K-2SO. A droid first, a hero forever.



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# WE ARE ALL LUMINOUS

## LEIA, POE, AND THE POWER OF LOOKING BEYOND YOURSELF

Marvel's *Star Wars: Poe Dameron*, Issue 14

Writer: Charles Soule

Artist: Angel Unzueta

Colorist: Arif Prianto

"Sooner than we'd like, I'll be luminous."

Those were the moving, haunting words from General Leia to Poe Dameron. It was a moment in which the real world leaped out of the fantasy world of Star Wars and looked us all straight in the face. Poe Dameron was getting his first big lesson in leadership from General Leia Organa, but we were all facing a sad truth just months after the passing of Carrie Fisher. Death and loss. Purpose beyond yourself. The harsh realities of real life. All of these big Star Wars themes are front and center while Poe and his Resistance mates deal with the death of veteran pilot L'ulo L'ampar. The pages of the fourteenth issue of Marvel's *Star Wars: Poe Dameron* comic book are some of the most arresting moments in the Star Wars saga.

L'ulo L'ampar was a popular character in the Poe comic and was a mentor and father figure to our favorite hotshot Resistance pilot. His death was one of action. Fast and loud, another casualty of war. L'ulo went out on his proverbial shield. As the rest of the Resistance gathers to remember him, every one of them can't help but think

this is how it will be for all of them. One minute you're here, the next minute you're gone. Just "atoms drifting through the universe" as Poe says. It is tough to draw inspiration from this, but Leia calls on Poe to address everyone and he finds the way, unknowingly taking his first step toward becoming his true self.

Poe himself says he's not ready for the task of saying goodbye, but he delivers a moving speech echoing the words Leia herself once told him. Words she heard from her brother Luke after he had heard them from Yoda. Words that connect to the core of the Star Wars story. We are not just flesh and bones, crude matter. We are luminous beings. Like Obi-Wan Kenobi, a death Leia witnessed and did not then fully understand, we all may vanish, but that doesn't mean we're gone. At that moment, we see the Poe Dameron Leia sees. He is a leader.

Poe doesn't yet see that, though. He views himself as a mere pilot. One weapon in a war full of weapons. An important weapon, yes, but just a small cog in this big machine. It's a familiar feeling for a lot of us. In this life, the tendency to play small often takes center stage. Even if you're like Poe Dameron, confident and bold with the coolest collection of jackets around, you still might struggle with seeing beyond your own limitations. We all need to learn our true worth. So, Poe, the cocksure ace pilot with the devil-may-care attitude, is us at that moment. He thinks he's just a pilot. Leia, though, knows better.

Leia grounds him and tasks him with trying to understand why she would ground one of her best while the specter of war looms. Poe eventually starts to see it. It's a lesson he won't finally grasp until the events of *The Last Jedi*. (His interpretation of leadership still needs a final edit.) He returns to Leia with the knowledge that this isn't his fight. The Resistance against the First Order isn't just about him. There are others here. All trying to do right. All working toward a

goal beyond them. Poe's looking at the small picture, his own self, is taking him away from the big picture.

As Poe stands before Leia, she talks about how long the Resistance might actually have to resist. The Rebellion was a long-simmering battle that lasted decades with many losses in leadership along the way. That is when Leia says those words, directly and poignantly. "And I'm sorry to say, probably sooner than we'd like...I'll be luminous." And it is at that moment that the pages of this comic book address the real world. The words "...I'll be luminous" are on a panel with art by Angel Unzueta and color by Arif Prianto. It is only of the face of General Leia, close and in detail. However, it is no longer a fictional character we see. It is Carrie Fisher looking at us. Released only months after her tragic passing, the panel, this issue, this story is about comforting her legion of fans and why we must think beyond our own self as a fan.

Carrie Fisher was Leia. Leia was Carrie Fisher. Everything that Carrie Fisher was in life, her very public struggles with mental health issues and drug addiction, her bold outspoken and vivacious personality that refused to stop fighting those issues, was even more valuable to the fandom than the self-rescuing princess she infused life into. You can see that on the faces of every generation of young fans, particularly, without question, the women and young girls, as they walk into conventions dressed like her and wear T-shirts with her face on them. You hear it in the words they say about her and to her.

In August 2015, I had the pleasure of moderating a panel with Carrie Fisher at a Wizard World comic convention in Chicago. Three thousand fans packed into the biggest convention center ballroom there to listen to their princess. She told fun stories, made everyone laugh, and, along with her trusty dog Gary, let us celebrate her character along with her. However, it was when the panel opened

up for audience questions that the full scope of what this character means emerged. The first audience member to step forward to ask a question didn't ask about the character or even the franchise, she talked about how Carrie's open and honest struggle with being bipolar helped her own struggle with it. Another young girl, not more than ten years old, asked how she could be strong like Princess Leia. The final question was from a young teenage girl that had an emotional support dog just like Carrie. The dog, named Leia, was there dressed up in a classic Leia costume, hair buns included. Carrie stopped the panel on that note and brought the girl up for an emotional private moment. As fans filed out and I went backstage, none of us could escape the full weight of the moment. Years ago, this woman had unknowingly stepped into a role she would never be able to leave. A fandom had embraced her as a princess and a Rebel leader, but it didn't stop there. Though many of us saw Carrie that day and immediately thought of her running around the Death Star, trading barbs with Han, and liberating a fictitious galaxy, many more saw a beacon of hope in this world and their lives. True inspiration. Important inspiration. Just a few months later, Carrie Fisher passed away.

What we can learn from that day, and countless others like it, is echoed in the pages of this issue. Just like Poe Dameron has to realize that this fight isn't just his, we, too, have to realize that Star Wars isn't just for us. It is for everyone. What you love about it. What your expectations are for the franchise. Even what inspirations you take from it are yours, but the power of Star Wars must always expand to ensure that all will be able to find themselves in it. You have to look outside yourself as a fan. We have to help grow this fandom, encourage the generations behind you and celebrate Star Wars for those around us that love it and those that one day will. Find your purpose as a fan outside of your own desires. Find your true worth as a fan. Leia Organa—Carrie Fisher—would want it that way.

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## ENFYS NEST

### UNMASKING THE NEW FACE OF REBELLION

*Solo: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Lawrence & Jon Kasdan

Director: Ron Howard

Try looking at the galaxy through the mask of Enfys Nest.

The Republic has given way to the Galactic Empire, and, though the promise of a safe and secure society was proclaimed during that transition of power, this new Empire immediately began pressing its mighty foot down on the necks of every being, planet, and culture. You grew up among that oppression, raised by a proud warrior mother. She fiercely protected you and your people, until she could no longer do so. The mantle was passed to you.

As you put on her mask, making it yours, you look closer at the universe around you, and it becomes clear that this Empire is here to mine planets for resources and enslave those deemed beneath it. Proud cultures are wiped out, robust industrial centers become broken down factories for the Imperial war machine, and the blind eye of its leaders have let the criminal underworld grow brazen. The criminal syndicates have gone from planet to planet and brought nothing but death, pain, and suffering. All to make themselves stronger. You feel alone in this world.

Of course, you'd find allies.

From behind your mask, you find more and more victims and survivors all across the galaxy. The crime lords have become powerful gathering, trading, and selling your resources. It is your people dying. Working economies collapse. Once proud, sovereign people now answer to viciousness and desolation. One by one, you find these souls and pull them closer. Some were warriors. Some were artists. Some were parents. Some were children. Some were refugees. Some were criminals. But all of them now have one thing in common: they are suffering, and they don't want to suffer anymore.

You know they need help. You need help. However, the only truth you really know is that no help is coming. The Empire doesn't care about you. The pleas of the galaxy will never reach those high towers on Coruscant. There isn't any cavalry coming to your rescue.

Of course, you'd fight back.

From behind your mask, you know diplomacy is dead. There is no bargaining with your oppressors. No begging, no reason, no hope. So, you have to make your own. You must rise up and take arms against your oppressors. Yet this fight cannot be mindless. It cannot be random, or futile. Your fight must be focused, with purpose, and be part of something beyond your immediate circle of influence. You must connect with something bigger. You must create a movement.

This fight will take its toll. All along the way, many beings that have followed you into the fight will fall. Their ends will not come with honor or acclaim. They will be nameless only to you and you will not have time to grieve—for you might be next. You're going to claw, bite, and scrape until the yoke of oppression has been removed and you are free. The only other option is death.

Of course, you'd want peace.

From behind your mask, you see your rivals standing before you, but you know they aren't the enemy. They, too, are trying to survive. Trying to win a game they all one day lose. Some want to leave but feel trapped. Some want freedom but feel they have to serve. Some feel they are scoundrels, but you sense they are good. They just don't understand.

To them, the hyperfuel you're fighting for represents credits and temporary protection from the crime lords they serve. It's a score. A big hit. Something to brag about at the next cantina. To you, it represents life.

You are standing in their way, so, naturally, they see you as marauders. Their comprehension of your existence stops at what they see. The masks of you and your allies have created the image you need to survive. It is fierce, it is tribal, but it is time. You need them to know the truth.

If your movement is to grow, it needs to reach everyone's ears. It needs to spread throughout the galaxy. You need them all to see who you really are. They need to look into the eyes of the one fighting. You are not a grizzled bounty hunter wreaking mindless havoc. You are not a world-weary treasure hunter competing for the same prize. You are not pirates with no loyalty. You are a young woman. Bright eyed and freckled. Overlooked and underestimated. You are part of a new generation that looked out across the galaxy and saw the failings of all those who came before you, claiming to protect you but only wanting power. You are part of a new generation that saw the dead and dying around you. You are part of a new generation that has gathered together, each with scars from what has been done to you, and you are shouting, "No more."

Of course, you'd take off your mask.

You are Enfys Nest, the new face of the Rebellion, and the war has just begun.



# LIGHTSABERS

## WEAPON OF THE JEDI, TOY OF THE PEOPLE

The Star Wars franchise

Writer: Various

In 2002, fifteen-year-old Canadian high school student Ghyslaine Raza made a videotape of himself using a golf club retriever as a double-bladed lightsaber in an effort to mimic the moves of Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace*. The bespectacled kid dances, spins, and leaps around a corner of his high school's studio. He is all in, fully committing to the moment, which includes him replicating the familiar sound effects of a lightsaber. The videotape was left behind, and a fellow student would later find and upload it to the Internet on April 14, 2003, unbeknownst to Ghyslaine. It became a viral video sensation before we even really grasped what that meant or what torment that could bring. Star Wars Kid was born. But with that title, infamy, and, later, thirty-four million plus views on YouTube alone, Ghyslaine Raza was subject to massive amounts of bullying, ridicule, and shame. All for being a passionate Star Wars fan with a love of lightsabers.

There but for the grace of God go I.

As you watch Ghyslaine Raza now, spinning and flying around a room locked in a lightsaber battle that only he can see and feel, you slowly start to realize what you're watching. You're not watching an awkward high school student lost in his own imagination. You're

not watching an Internet meme that ushered in countless parodies and even more online abuse. You're watching yourself. Star Wars Kid is us.

Who here among us *hasn't* grabbed a cardboard tube, a broomstick, or a flashlight and immediately made the sound of an igniting lightsaber? Who here among us hasn't daydreamed about being locked in ferocious combat against the dastardly Sith or self-righteous Jedi? (I mean, it's all about perspective, right?) Who here among us has not purchased a lightsaber toy? Better yet...who here among us can resist seeing a lightsaber toy near you and NOT grab hold of it and transport yourself into the Emperor's throne room or fiery shores of Mustafar? You can't. I can't. Ghyslain Raza couldn't and nor should he have. The lightsaber itself is, without a doubt, one of the reasons we love Star Wars.

It doesn't take much to understand the appeal of the lightsaber. It's simple and direct. George Lucas was inspired by the science fiction of Flash Gordon serials and the swashbuckling adventures of his youth. He wanted swords in his story. Creating laser swords was a natural progression. The concept of what we eventually know as lightsabers certainly changed from the early designs, including the famous Ralph McQuarrie concept art pieces, but the core was always there. Korean animator Nelson Shin is often credited as the person to use a rotoscope to create the shimmering colored blades.

There are several ways for fans to first be introduced to the lightsaber. For many, it is the subdued action of *A New Hope* where Luke's minimalist training and the stand and slash fight between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader. For others, it's the dazzling display of acrobatics and art in *The Phantom Menace*. And now it's possible that a younger fan's eye bulged at the sight of Kylo Ren's red broadsword-style blade or the animated sabers of Ezra Bridger

or Ahsoka Tano. There are (thankfully) many, many ways to fall in love with a lightsaber, but one thing remains constant—the sounds of the lightsaber. And, once again, we find ourselves at the feet of Ben Burtt's genius.

Ben Burtt created the now unmistakable sound of the lightsaber with the motor hum from old movie projectors and interference of a television on a microphone. The latter part an accident...or just simply fate. However he did it, Burtt created a collection of enthralling sounds that were one of his personal favorites in the franchise. It's not far off to call them the most important sound effect in Star Wars. Consider what happens when you grab hold of a replica lightsaber? You immediately start making your own version of the ignition hum, the whir of the movement, and, most tantalizing, the crackle of two lightsabers colliding in battle.

A cult of lightsabers has sprung up around the simple idea of laser swords in space. There are countless videos and writing on the myriad colors and their significance. There are real-world experts on the various lightsaber fighting disciplines and knowing that Obi-Wan uses Form III while Vader fights with Form V are key bits of knowledge to many. There is a fascination with the hilts of the weapon, and knowing what kind of lightsaber you would have, should you ever be asked to join the Jedi Order, is an answer every Star Wars fan has. Yeah, lightsabers are important to Star Wars.

In 1995, during the Power of the Force toy release and resurgence of the brand, I purchased a Hasbro replica of Luke Skywalker's green lightsaber. Fitting—considering that saber was part of my first memory of becoming of Star Wars fan. Years and years later, I'm still drawn to the simple yet powerful design of the hilt and the bold statement of that green blade. Over twenty years later, that same lightsaber with the *same* C-cell batteries sits in the corner of my room; it has followed me from old houses and former work offices

before. Often, while trying to write or just roaming my house, I'll spot that lightsaber out of the corner of my eye. I'll stop, smile, and pick up the blade that represents part of my love for this franchise. And with no one else around to watch, I ignite the weapon, the batteries bringing life to an otherwise simple piece of plastic, and I hack and slash my way through an imaginary lightsaber fight I've been winning my entire life. My own sound effects drown out the hum, whir, and crackle the toy makes for itself. I end the fight with one final move and put the toy back into the corner, knowing I'll fight another day.

I don't know where Ghyslain Raza is right now and nothing can ever make up for what he went through, but I hope he knows he was never alone. I'm Star Wars Kid, too. We're all Star Wars Kid. And we always will be.

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# RAE SLOANE

## THE INSPIRATIONAL VILLAIN

*Empire's End: Aftermath*

Author: Chuck Wendig

There is a lot to admire about Rae Sloane.

Born into the lower class, she never stopped dreaming of a better life and soon found herself working hard to make a name for herself while people overlooked her. She foiled assassination attempts, uncovered corruption, received well-deserved promotions that people still questioned, fought honorably and smartly until the bitter end, stopped a cataclysmic event that would have changed the fate of the galaxy, and took a bold step to start it all over again. Beyond this, she transcended the world of Star Wars to become a real-world inspiration to fans, particularly women of color, and has an entire legion of passionate fans behind her.

There is really a lot to admire about Rae Sloane.

Except that she just so happened to do all of this for the Empire, you know, the team we're rooting against. Rae Sloane is a remarkable thought-provoking character that challenges our long-held notions about those on "that" side and redefines the concept of a villain. For in the final pages of Chuck Wendig's novel *Aftermath: Empire's End*, Grand Admiral Rae Sloane, having just saved the day, is faced with a choice to pursue a change of heart and direction, submit herself to the will of the recently-formed New Republic,

or risk heading out to the Unknown Regions with the tattered remnants of the Empire to rebuild it in her image. At that moment, she doubled down on who she was, ensured that she would not submit herself to anyone, and decided to take what she deserved.

Rae Sloane believed in the idea of the Empire from an early age. Growing up poor on the core planet of Ganthel, she had to live her youth under the constant threat of local criminal gangs. The Empire, from her perspective, cleaned them out and removed the threat. She wanted to be part of that. We, though, have the benefit of knowing the whole story. That the Empire was oppressing the galaxy, helping to make the criminal underworld more robust, and was being run by a dark sorcerer bent on galactic domination. Yes, all that is true, but Rae Sloane's perspective was also true and that informed her entire journey. The world around her was bad, but Rae Sloane was good.

Sloane wasn't naive, though. She made a name for herself by thwarting an assassination attempt on the Emperor and Darth Vader, exposing the corruption of Imperial associate Count Vidian, and spent her entire career protecting the nature of **her** Empire, the version she grew up believing in. But she wasn't lost in some hyper-realized state of bliss. She saw the ideals she held to falling around her piece by piece. She was, perhaps, too far into the organization by then. Achieving military ranks not normally given to a low born woman in an organization run mostly by old men. But, in the end, while working with the mysterious but crazed Gallius Rax, secretly tasked with destroying the Empire by Palpatine himself, Rae realized what the Empire had become, and perhaps always was, so she stopped it, saving an entire planet and her so-called enemies in the process.

A major subplot of the *Aftermath* books centers around Gallius Rax carrying out the Emperor's contingency plan to tear down the

pieces of the Empire, head to the Unknown Regions, and start it all again—for the memory of the Emperor. As Gallius Rax lies dying, he gives Rae that task, should she accept it. As Wendig writes, Rax says, “You serve the Contingency now.”

And that is where the choice before Rae Sloane puts the fandom in a delicious quandary. Can we root for a villain? We’re used to a certain kind of redemption in Star Wars: a character lives their entire life acting one way, fighting for one thing, then, in the end, sees the light and does what is perceived as right. That’s not to be taken lightly, mind you. That classic version of redemption is rich with value. However, when Rax puts that choice before her, telling her she can go on serving the Emperor, his Empire, and all that it was, Rae Sloane realizes that she hadn’t changed from that little girl who dreamed of heading off to save the galaxy. Her version of the Empire wasn’t wrong, it just didn’t exist. She had been part of something that wasn’t hers and now she could go build something new as she wanted, as she always believed in. So, she chooses.

“I serve no one,” proclaims Rae Sloane.

Her redemption is personal.

With that, she leaves to start what will become the First Order. What happens out in those Unknown Regions is still a mystery. By the time *The Force Awakens* begins, Rae Sloane is gone and the First Order has become someone else’s vision. But that’s just story. Plot waiting to be revealed. What is there for us is a character that transcended any affiliations and allegiances to become a vibrant testament to individuality. She represents rising above obstacles, naysayers, and the prejudices placed in front of you while never losing sight of who you are. Is Rae Sloane a villain? Maybe. Maybe not. But she is definitely one thing.

Rae Sloane is an inspiration.

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**A CHOICE****LUKE SKYWALKER, DEL MEEKO,  
AND THE LESSONS OF A JEDI***Star Wars Battlefront II*

Writers: Walt Williams &amp; Mitch Dyer

Are you looking for some deep lessons and critical insight into the ethos of the Jedi? How do you feel about gaining a better understanding of when and why some Jedi fight back? Would you like to get the best sense of where Luke Skywalker's head was at when he began his post-*Return of the Jedi* quest to learn more about the Jedi and seek out artifacts and locations key to their history? Do you also want to destroy some icky space bugs called Scritters? That's a lot of questions, but the answer should be yes (especially about the Scritters). Sit down, grab your video game controller, and let's go deep into *Battlefront II*.

The story of *Battlefront II* is about Iden Versio and her elite Imperial agent mates in the Inferno Squad, but, along the way, because this is a video game, you get to take a few steps through the galaxy as legends like Lando Calrissian, Han Solo, Princess Leia, and, of course, Luke Skywalker. All the levels help fulfill that inner child-like desire to be these legendary Star Wars characters, but when you join up with Luke Skywalker you get an insightful look into the inner workings of a legend.



The level finds the freshly minted Jedi Knight and Iden's squad mate and eventual husband Del Meeko on the remote planet of Pillio looking for the same thing: one of the Emperor's observatories chock full of relics, most of them having to do with the Sith. Del is there to destroy it, Luke is there to find clues. However, both soon need each other's help to survive. It is through the eyes of Del, a lifelong Imperial raised on Coruscant to fear the Jedi, that we learn our lessons.

Del Meeko is initially saved by Skywalker and questions him as to why. Luke is, after all, part of the Rebel Alliance still fighting the Imperial remnants just after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. Luke then proceeds to give him, and us, a quick yet mighty lesson in mercy.

"Because you asked."

An entire squadron of stormtroopers lies dead just outside this setting. Cut down by Luke's blade. Del points this out, but Luke explains that Del gave him a choice. The stormtroopers didn't. Star Wars fans spend a lot of time analyzing when it is or isn't a good time for Jedi to fight. They're generals in the Clone Wars but claim they can't fight wars at other times. The answer and debate are never quite clear, but here is Luke explaining his philosophy. You ask for mercy, you get it. We all have a choice.

This also factors into Luke's mindset later on as it relates to Kylo Ren. Luke gave in to his impulses and attempted to strike young Ben down out of fear. At that moment, he didn't give Ben the chance to make a choice. It completed Ben's turn and gutted Luke. The legendary Skywalker betrayed his own beliefs and created a monster in the process. No wonder he ran off to a long-forgotten island (finding it in part with the compass he takes from the Observatory in this game sequence).

It all comes down to choice. Luke and Del go on to finish their collective mission, helping each other along the way (there are so many Scritters to fight). We even gain some insight as to the dark nature of the spin Emperor Palpatine put on the galaxy. He turned the Jedi into villains while hiding his true Force-filled nature from those that served him. (Del is shocked to find the door to the Emperor's storage closet locked by the Force.) But as they both leave, Del wants to know what is next. How can a Rebel Jedi and Imperial agent walk away from this impromptu partnership?

Luke doesn't give the hard sell on leaving the Empire. Should Del Meeko turn away from his lifelong service to the Imperials? What can he do as one man who **does** see what has gone wrong and was always happening? There are no answers given by Luke Skywalker. He just brings it all back to the question of choice.

We all have a choice to be better.

And with that, Del Meeko starts his journey to defection and fighting for freedom. One that he takes alongside Iden Versio after she can no longer turn a blind eye to the choices she sees her Empire continue to make.

It is exciting and invigorating to find that Star Wars, time and time again, serves the powerful purpose set forth by George Lucas: speak to the youth, those twelve-year-olds on the brink of adulthood, and give them timeless lessons in morality. Star Wars always has to come back to that whether it be in its movies, TV shows, books, and, as here, the video games. It's the lifeblood of the saga. We all want to swing a lightsaber, hack through stormtroopers, and save the day, just like Luke Skywalker. Yet at the end of the day, Luke Skywalker and Star Wars itself, just want you to do one thing: make the choice to be better.

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## YODA FACES DOOKU

### WARS DO NOT MAKE ONE GREAT, BUT MOMENTS DO

*Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*

Writers: George Lucas & Jonathan Hales

Director: George Lucas

The theater crowds across the fandom were stirring. We love our lightsaber fights and we need our compelling duels. The big fights between the biggest stars. As *Attack of the Clones* was coming to an end, the excitement started to grow. No matter where you were in your relationship with this movie at this point during your first viewing, you knew what was coming. The villain. The hero. The lightsabers. It was time for the main event.

Yet, this time, it didn't go as planned. The dynamic duo of Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker looked to have an easy victory against Count Dooku. It wasn't just about a two-on-one advantage. Dooku was older and unproven to the audience, Obi-Wan had defeated Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace*, and Anakin proudly boasted earlier in the movie that he was as good a swordsman as Master Yoda. This should have been a cakewalk, but like many great upsets in our own sports world, it didn't go the way we thought it would.

Though the result was surprising, the fight itself wasn't disappointing. Despite having to match up to the duel of the fates

battle against Darth Maul in *Episode I*, we got to see Obi-Wan stand tall against Sith lightning and Anakin duel wielded two lightsabers while fighting Dooku in the dark, creating some tantalizing imagery. But now our two heroes lay injured on the ground and the villain was about to leave. This couldn't have been the main event.

Well, it wasn't.

Yoda was here.

Yoda is viewed as the greatest Jedi of his time and perhaps of all time, surpassed in theory only by Luke Skywalker. Though fans can get sweaty, like the late great geek culture icon Jon Schnepf would say, about Mace's skill with a lightsaber, Qui-Gon's insight, or Luke Skywalker's raw power, that's all fun scuttlebutt. All two feet, two inches of Yoda stands tall above the debates. Luke Skywalker was seeking a great warrior on Dagobah and, though Yoda proclaimed that wars not make one great, moments do.

We heard the footsteps first and then saw a familiar shape in an approaching shadow. We all knew who was coming and we were ready. It was time for Yoda to jump out of the cave and into action. A lot of questions, many logistical, came racing into your brain as this moment built up. How does Yoda fight? How does he overcome that size disadvantage? What else is up his sleeve?

A short battle of Force lightning gives way to what we wanted to see, some for years, some for the course of this movie. Yoda draws out his weapon. As the music picks up a notch, we're treated to a Jedi hero pose. The blade is ignited, it's green for those keeping score at home, and Yoda is ready to fight. Finally.

Alright, time out on the nostalgic look back on Star Wars history. Let's get real. This isn't a far-fetched, hyperbolic memory. Crowds

watching *Attack of the Clones*, maligned as it is at times, were buzzing at this moment. For many, we had held that tiny Kenner action figure in our hands and wondered what Yoda was like in action. This was our answer. The reactions in 2002 reflected that. Don't let anyone tell you different. I was there. You were there. We all were there watching a great mentor be the legend we always knew he was.

And the fight ends, by the way, with another lesson from our little green friend. One as worthy as an inspirational Yoda calendar as any other bit of wisdom he's taught us. Dooku knows he can't win, so he goes after the one weakness Yoda has: his good heart. Using the Force, Yoda's former apprentice nearly crushes Kenobi and Skywalker with a piece of the Geonosis hangar bay. Without hesitation, Yoda gives up the fight to save his friends, choosing compassion over victory...and that, unlike wars, does make one great.

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## **"I'M LANDO CALRISSIAN"**

### **THE TRUSTWORTHY TRAITOR**

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

In some corners of the galaxy, you just might find someone that would describe Lando Calrissian, that silky smooth gambler-turned-businessman from Socorro, as a traitor. He's out for himself. He's a con man, a trickster. Beyond his charming smile and flashy capes, is a man that will sell out even his closest of friends. There's not much to Lando and you definitely can't trust him.

If that's what they're saying, then they don't get Lando.

And, yes, that includes Han Solo.

Lando Calrissian has a lot of skills, schemes, and stories. He's full of ego and a strong sense of self-worth. He is his own person, for sure. A needed and unique presence in the galaxy. But what Lando has done best is survive. He's done it mostly on his own with very little help in a galaxy bursting at the seams with conflict, dangerous underworlds, and trouble around every corner. Through all of that, Lando has learned that there is only person's trust you need: your own.

Lando trusts himself and puts almost all of his faith into his own cape. There's room for some others. L3-37 had it then. Lobot has it

now. Willrow Hood might have it always. However, there is no one more loyal to Lando than Lando. And he knows that's for the best.

Yeah. He did sell out Han Solo, Chewbacca, Leia, Threepio, and the war they brought with them to Bespin. So, sure, he is a traitor to them. But ask yourself this question: what would you do if someone showed up at your doorstep and their mere presence threatened the safety of everything you've worked so hard for? They call you a friend and you can't deny some shared memories, but when that "friend" destroyed your ship, nearly got you killed, and came back to swindle that very ship out from under you—there is not a lot of reason to put any of your trust in them, now is there?

Lando had to survive.

Han Solo did know that. Leia picked it up right away. You might think it best to not trust Lando, but he honestly had no love for the Empire. No way they were getting his loyalty either. He just wants to keep going on his own path.

Yet, the one thing Han didn't fully understand, the one thing buried beneath it all, is that Lando has a good heart. While he has swindled, smuggled, and stolen his way around the galaxy, it was never out of ill-will. He was just an intergalactic Robin Hood stealing from the rich and (mostly) giving it all back to himself.

So, when the deal he struck with the Empire he'd spent a lifetime running from started going bad, he took a long, hard look at what his survival chances looked like. And it was getting bleaker and bleaker by the minute. It was time to take stock in what was going on around him. Lando had spent a long time trying to escape the war that had now spread across the galaxy. The deal he cut was only going to hold it back for a while, delay the inevitable, but now it had found him. The Empire. The Rebellion. The stand

against the forces of evil. It was here and he knew it. Good people were suffering right in front of him and now the entire situation was quite literally choking him around the neck (thanks, Chewie). Lando Calrissian knew that, in order to survive, he had to expand what and who he was loyal to. He had to change, and it was time to give out his trust.

There was still time to save Han. There was still time for this cavalier gambler with a heart only after his own desires to put his faith in something bigger, fight back against those that would have him destroyed, and keep going on in this galaxy. Our list of heroes expands, and he joins the fight. A fight he's going to help win.

Trust Lando.

Just like C-3PO said.

Always and forever, trust Lando Calrissian.



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# HOW TO TEACH A JEDI

## YODA REVEALS HIMSELF TO LUKE

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

## SO, YOU'VE DECIDED TO TRAIN A JEDI!

### A PAMPHLET FOR THE MODERN JEDI MASTER

Five easy steps to training a Chosen One!

#### Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to train a Jedi!

Passing on what you have learned is a valuable aspect of the Jedi Order. It literally keeps the Order alive! A galaxy without Jedi would be a bad thing. Actually, it *was* a bad thing. For over twenty years, the fire of the Jedi went out and darkness ruled. Any Jedi or Force-sensitive being had to run or remain hidden until now! The plan is in motion, the Galactic Civil War is booming, and it is finally time to train more Jedi.

Training a new Jedi is difficult enough, but now you're without a fully functional academy to bolster your efforts. This is something you will have to accomplish on your own. But don't worry!

Here are five easy steps to help you train a Jedi

### Step One—Send out the call

When is the right time to begin the training? Hard to say, but it just might be a matter of trusting in the Force. When the events of the galaxy have reached a tipping point, you'll probably know it's time. We suggest waiting until some sort of superweapon, particularly a planet killer, has been destroyed.

When that happens, send out a message via the cosmic Force. If possible, use one of your Force ghost friends to reach out. Force ghosts are 80 percent more likely to be successful than visions.

**Special Tip!** *Make sure the call to action is vague and only provides a location and your name. This will make the message appear more mystical, like a message from beyond. This is key because your subject is most likely busy fighting a war or being part of a resistance. A ghostly message or vision will get their attention!*

### Step Two—Know their misconceptions

The being you have chosen to train is most likely full of great misconceptions about what it means to be a Jedi. This comes from years and years of false idolization of the Jedi and common misunderstanding of the true nature of the Jedi. To them, the Jedi were a myth.

Most likely your student will have been given a lightsaber, a glorious weapon to be sure, and tossed into an epic journey of personal discovery set against the backdrop of large-scale conflict. This will most commonly lead to your potential craving two things:

1. Adventure
2. Excitement

These are both bad.

Additionally, in seeking you out, they will have a preconceived notion of who you are. Jedi Knights and Masters are thought to be great warriors and heroes. They'll be looking for something else. Flowing robes, warm smile, encouraging words.

This is wrong. All of it.

It's up to you to change that.

### **Step Three—Immediately test them**

Whereas the golden age of the Jedi Order allowed teachers to spread out lessons and training over years, if not decades, this is no longer the case. Time is of the essence. First off, your new trainee is probably *much* older than they would normally be.

**Did you know?** *Though it was a staple of the training of years gone by, Padawan braids are not necessary for training in this modern age of Jedi. If your current trainee insists on a braid, allow them to do it, but make sure it's on their own time.*

In the past, Force-sensitive Younglings were taken away from their families at a young age to give them the full allotted time to get ready for their formalized Jedi Trials. You do not have that luxury. (Editor's Note: We understand that the institutionalized abduction of Jedi Younglings might be problematic now. We suggest our pamphlet: "So you see the Jedi in a different light now?")

As your student approaches, begin placing obstacles and challenges in front of them. Crash their ship. Let them struggle. Allow doubt to grow within them. You don't want anyone here who doesn't really want to be here. Just don't hurt them...unless it's their pride.

For an added bonus, perhaps even for your own entertainment, play a character. Kind of a crazy hermit that they would never expect to be a great Jedi. They will learn a valuable lesson in judging people by appearance and size. You might be able to score some tasty rations or a portable light for your hut.

#### **Step Four—Get to the core of their issues**

The official lessons haven't even begun, but already your student has started to question why they are here with you or what they are doing. They're still holding to this great ideal of what they are supposed to be learning. They still have no understanding of what the Force actually is, despite having used it to their advantage before. You know the Force is not just about hearing voices and moving rocks, but they don't. Before they can start understanding the full power of the Force, they need to see the core issues that hold them back, cloud their minds, and could potentially pervert their intentions.

Core Issues Ranked:

5. *Fear*
4. *Wanting to run off and kill or save somebody*
3. *Anger*
2. *Hate*
1. *Impatience*

By not giving them what they expected—the gallant knight with the easy training lessons—you will start to peel back their layers. It will expose their biggest problem. At the point, you've got their attention.

## Step Five—Reveal yourself and change the tone

With their attention fully garnered, reveal yourself. Reveal who you really. However, have fun with this. This is your chance to be really dramatic. Lean into it. Don't soften the blow. You don't want them here, you don't feel as though they're ready to be trained, and now is the time to let them know the seriousness of their journey ahead.

**Special Tip!** *Just start talking to another presence in the room. Give them no warning. One minute you're serving a nice swamp broth, the next you're talking to the spirit of an old shared friend.*

### ***Bonus!***

*Swamp broth instructions.*

1. *Bring two quarts of tepid swamp water to a boil*
2. *Add 1 tbsp of local mud and seasoning of choice*
3. *Stir until you're mentally ready to try it.*

With this dramatic switch in tone and action, your trainee will not start to realize that something is amiss. They'll start to grasp the mistakes and assumptions they have made up until now. It will sink in and the look on their face will say it all. **It is the look of someone understanding that the very tone of their journey has been forever altered.** Everything they thought they knew has begun to fall away.

They've found you after being plucked off a faraway planet and early success found them as they received rewards and acceptance like never before. They've spent their entire lives believing they were far from the action, but now they have found themselves at the center of it all with the sudden knowledge that they have been called to this path. You can forgive them for thinking their training

was going to be learning some lightsaber fighting forms and neat mind tricks. The simple next step on a bigger journey to glory.

It's not. And, at this moment, the look on their face will let you know that you've got them. It is your counsel they should heed. Your insight they should study. Though they still cannot comprehend what is next, they are finally ready to learn.

Then you can both finish the swamp broth.

### **Bonus Step—Scare Them**

When they profess that they won't be afraid for what is to come, stare them right in the eyes and growl, "You will be. You. Will. Be."

It's frightening and effective.

Thanks for deciding to train a Jedi. May the Force be with you.

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**PALS****FINN IS HERE TO SAVE REY***Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writer: J.J. Abrams &amp; Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

Let's give Finn some credit.

He is one loyal friend. A true-blue buddy. The kind that is going to do everything he can to make sure you are ok. In the *Young Guns* movies, Emilio Estevez's Billy The Kid talks about the importance of pals and says there isn't anything he won't do for a friend he loves (yes, I did manage to work a reference about *Young Guns I & II* into a Star Wars book. Feeling pretty good about that, actually). Finn understands the importance of a good pal. It's on full, inspirational display when he heads back to Starkiller Base to save Rey.

The reason we need to give Finn credit for this moment, the reason to celebrate it, is that often the conversation around Finn is about the big-picture journey he is on. His lessons to learn center around connecting with bigger causes beyond your own goals and choosing a side when the easier thing to do is, as Benicio Del Toro's DJ tells him, "Don't join." And we should talk about that. Finn's journey from stormtrooper to committed Rebel is a valuable lesson for the Star Wars story and the real world. It's also similar to Han Solo's lifelong struggle to put aside the scoundrel and stay the good guy. Which is why it's fitting that Finn AND Han (and Chewbacca of

course!) go back to Starkiller Base together. It's there that Han discovers Finn has no true plan to disable the shields. He just wants to save Rey.

Han is understandably a bit mad. This leads to him blurting out his pitch-perfect "That's not how the Force works" line. It's a moment that is also used in dissertations or, rather, podcast monologues, to show that Finn's motivations are only about Rey. And that's true. But before we all travel too far down that line of Finn's overall growth and journey, he deserves a lot of credit for what he's doing here, in this moment, on Starkiller Base.

Finn was willing to sacrifice so much, most importantly himself, to save Rey. The Resistance needed to destroy this base, but, from their point of view at that moment, they didn't exactly need to save Rey. So, Finn flubbed a bit. He acted as if he knew more than he did and got himself to the planet's surface to save his friend. That has to be worth something.

It is worth something.

Finn's powerful devotion to friendship is a Star Wars statement on connections, relationships, support, and loyalty. Finn grew up as FN-2187. A nameless number in a growing war machine. First Order classmates, bunkmates, and squad mates did exist. Finn wasn't alone. But none of those connections had any warmth to them or any real depth. Numbering your troopers and scrubbing them of personality does not speak of a healthy environment to build connections in. Sterile isolation and staying behind your walls are not the building blocks of a healthy spirit.

Finn starts to fall away from the First Order because of fear and a sense of survival. That's what causes him to run. But what makes him stay in his new life are the connections he soon makes. Poe first,



then Rey. Finn's early moments with them are most likely the first time he's felt noticed, encouraged, supported, and, even, hugged. It's his first experience with human connection (or alien connection... or Droid connection—big galaxy for sure) and it's opened up his world. It's opened him up even if it frightened him at the same time. This new connection seemed to overwhelm him by the time he reached Takodana. Yet, when danger arrived in the form of the First Order, he turned right around for Rey.

Rey, of course, actually frees herself and she runs into Finn, Han, and Chewie. That's not actually the point. Finn came back to save her. That's powerful enough for Rey, someone who was abandoned, but it is equally as powerful for Finn. He risked everything to go and save her because, for the first time in his life, he had a reason to go back. That's why it's a driving force for him going forward as well. FN-2187 lived most of his life without any connections, no true friendships, and definitely no romance (spawning a solid group of fans rooting for a Rey-and-Finn romance or maybe even more for Finn and Poe). However, now, Finn has friends. And now that he has friends, he's never going to let them go. No matter the cost.

Finn deserves credit.

He understands the importance of the word pals.

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# **"AND GET TO YOUR TRANSPORTS"**

## **THE LEADERSHIP OF LEIA**

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

We all have our favorite Leia.

She's one character, of course, but, for her entire existence, Leia has often been viewed by way of her outfits and situations. Yes, that phenomenon covers Han, Luke, and others as well, but it's even more defined for Leia Organa. This can be attributed to the classic Kenner line of Star Wars figures. Sadly, Leia was the only humanoid woman character in the original line. This gave us five different versions of Leia. Classic Leia, Bespin Leia, Hoth Leia, Bounty Hunter Disguise Leia, and Combat Poncho Leia. Later lines, including the modern releases, cover Ewok Village Leia, General Leia, and, of course, the iconic beyond comprehension, Steel Bikini Leia (now more of a testament to the Huttslayer she is than the fetishized Slave Girl she was). One character, many Leias.

Each figure represented a different corner of the overall character we loved. Classic Leia was the royal, self-rescuing princess. Bespin Leia was the ethereal beauty insightfully sensing something was amiss. Bounty Hunter Leia was bravely rescuing the man she

loved. Combat Poncho Leia was fighting a war on the frontlines in—well—one hell of a cool poncho. Different looks that inspired and enthralled us. Separate chapters of a wonderful story. We all have our favorite Leia and mine is the strong-willed, defiant leader without the glamour of a gown or the protection of a mask. It's the one standing strong in the harsh cold and refusing to leave. Make mine Hoth Leia.

The legacy of Leia is built on her many powerful words and actions, but her leadership is best displayed on Hoth. It's not from an impassioned speech or grand lesson. The Leia we see there in a crumbling command center is one with the weight of the Rebel Alliance on her shoulders and she knows it. The ground rumbled with every step of the massive assault walkers as the enemy closed in. Walls began to collapse as the screams got closer. A dark menace in a flowing cape black as night cut through the ranks of the Rebellion. The end was near. But she did not waver nor run.

Princess Leia stayed.

This is in stark contrast to the Battle of Yavin in *A New Hope* where she seems only to be standing around for moral support. Not so much this time around. The tone is entirely different. Here now, she's in charge and has sent away others to safety while risking her own. She is still throwing out orders and moving the chess pieces of war around the battlefield. This is a leader doing everything possible to keep hope alive.

Which is why she has no time for Han Solo when he bursts into the command center. When Leia barks out, "Why are you still here?" it's not just indicative of their classic Bogey and Bacall romance, which, to be clear, is absolutely on display here, especially as she evades Han while he reaches for her. It's a warrior with no time for someone who didn't want to stick around. She's been making

the choice to fight, rebel, and help others for a long time now and this scoundrel still can't quite make up his mind? She has no need for that.

Han's not wrong, though. She needs to go as the situation turns even more dire. So, even this is a sign of a good leader. You have to heed the advice of others, but in the end make your own call. Han is the one telling her it's time to go, but the look on her face is all about her making the choice. She has more value to the Rebellion alive. This battle is lost and they all must fight another day, so it is time to go. As Han leads her out, Leia's final order is to make sure that those fighting with her go as well.

"And get to your transports."

It's everything you need to know about the kind of leader Leia is in the span of a few seconds. Princess Leia stayed because the battle was not over. She stayed because her people needed her. She stayed so that others could get safe. She is the soul of the Rebellion and the leader in the line of fire. When all seems bleak and hope is fading, in the darkest hour, she burns the brightest.

Princess Leia stayed then and she's still there at the center of it all.

Yeah, Hoth Leia is my favorite Leia.

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**R2-D2 KNOWS IT ALL****THE ASTROMECH WHO KNEW TOO MUCH  
AND NEVER SAID A WORD**

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

It's a small moment. Almost a joke used to answer a vergence in continuity created by George Lucas himself. Toward the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, Bail Organa gives Captain Raymus Antilles custody of C-3PO and R2-D2. That in and of itself connects *Episode III* to Threepio's line in *A New Hope* about belonging to Captain Antilles, but Bail follows that up with a simple order of having the protocol droid's mind wiped with a knowing smile. As if to say to Antilles and us that there are a lot of secrets in the galaxy and we all know C-3PO can't keep them. It's a funny little mo—WAIT A MINUTE. R2-D2 knew everything.

He. Knew. Everything.

The first time this dawns on you, the entire story of the original trilogy rolls out in front of you with an entirely new wrinkle. That squat, sarcastic beeping best friend to Luke Skywalker knew so much about what was going on. Every battle, every mission, and, perhaps, every revelation remained inside his head and he didn't say a word. If you have a secret, dump it in Artoo!

Except, to quote Anakin in *Revenge of the Sith*, “This is where the fun begins.”

Wild theories and fun head canon are part of the Star Wars fan experience. Did Boba Fett kill Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru? Was Chewbacca already aware of Obi-Wan Kenobi upon meeting him in the cantina? And what exactly did Artoo know or keep to himself? It becomes an entertaining session of everyone’s favorite game called What If?

What if he and Obi-Wan were communicating with hidden signals upon first meeting up on Tatooine? What if he was so mad at Yoda on Dagobah because he knew who he really was and wanted him to stop wasting time? What if, after Leia kissed Luke in the Hoth medical bay, Artoo beeped that he happened to be there when they were both born on Polis Massa and found this disturbing? Which of course brings up the biggest What If. What if Artoo knew that Luke Skywalker was the son of his former combat buddy Anakin Skywalker?

Ahhhh! So many delicious scenarios come pouring into your Star Wars nerd brain that the dam starts to break. There is now fresh subtext to so many classic scenes. When Ol’ Ben Kenobi says, “I don’t seem to remember ever owning a droid” and gives Artoo a curious look, what was a small moment is now full of Artoo beeping, “What? Have the twin suns of this planet fried your wires? I fought with you...for years! And you didn’t own me, you owned R4-P17. I guess her death didn’t affect you as it did me! You ol’ fool.”

So many questions. So many wonderful questions.

The counter to this (and my joy) is that George Lucas had messed up his own canon. It’s fair to assume that in 1977, Ben Kenobi didn’t recall owning a droid because Ben Kenobi **didn’t** own a droid,

despite those fabled early treatments of *The Adventures of Luke Starkiller as taken from the Journal of the Whills, Saga 1: The Star Wars* that George scribbled out in the early 1970s. Obi-Wan Kenobi was never meant to pal around with R2-D2. It was an oversight, a mistake, not supposed to be. All of that are fair points.

But, come on, where is the fun in that?

Part of the joy of celebrating Star Wars is also being able to have fun with Star Wars. And this is just plain fun. Look, Star Wars urban legend has us believing that Lucas had previously said that C-3PO and R2-D2 were witnesses to the entire saga, so this isn't entirely out of nowhere. R2-D2 is just the one with all the knowledge and that expands the impact of the character. Artoo isn't just a repository of records and events, he's a trusted friend and agent. He knew what he was doing when he went away from Threepio after crashing on Tatooine because he had been there before. He knew who he was looking for and why. The plan had begun and R2 was there to finish the mission. And maybe that is the answer to one final What If? What if Bail Organa kept his memory intact because all along R2-D2 was more important than we ever could possibly have imagined and what if *that* was what George Lucas was finally telling us?

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# DOOKU RECRUITS OBI-WAN

## WHEN STAR WARS CHALLENGED YOUR TRUST

*Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*

Writers: George Lucas & Jonathan Hales

Director: George Lucas

Star Wars is built around the universal struggle of good versus evil, but that doesn't mean it is without nuance or moments that force you to dig a little deeper into the motivations of its characters. The prequels gave us Count Dooku, one of the "Lost Twenty" Jedi Masters who left the order. He turned to the dark side and became the apprentice to Darth Sidious aka Good Ol' Sheev Palpatine. He was also the face of the Separatist movement—the group of planets, guilds, and systems that wanted out of the Republic, the same Republic that was home to our favorite Jedi, royals, and clones, so much that they engaged in a war over that belief. All of this makes for a very good resume for a bad guy. Count Dooku—also called Darth Tyranus—was bad.

But were his intentions?

In *Attack of the Clones*, Obi-Wan Kenobi is captured during his intergalactic private eye investigation and held captive on Geonosis. He soon finds himself face to face with Dooku, and Kenobi, as well as the audience, is forced to question everything he believes about the two grand institutions he serves, the Jedi Order and



the Republic. One was losing its way and the other was being eaten away from the inside. Hard truths for Kenobi to face. At this moment, Star Wars wasn't just asking if you were good or bad, it was asking you to answer a more important question first: who do you trust? Because that answer will lead you forward.

Obi-Wan has every reason not to trust Count Dooku. Though he has not been exposed as a Sith at this point, Dooku left the Jedi Order and has taken control of an army threatening the peace of the galaxy. Then as Obi-Wan marks him a traitor, Dooku lies to him. Says he has nothing to do with his capture and denies Jango Fett is on this planet. These are lies. Kenobi knows this. He tracked Fett here, so when the tone in Dooku's words shifts soon after, Kenobi is not wrong for withholding his trust.

However, everything Count Dooku says from then on is right. The Trade Federation was working with Darth Sidious. The Republic Senate, long corrupt, was now under the influence of the Sith Lord, and the Jedi have missed this because the dark side of the Force was finding it too easy to blind them. It's all accurate, so the question is what do you do when a person you know you can't trust is now the only one telling the truth?

Dooku even invokes the name of Qui-Gon Jinn, Kenobi's former Jedi Master AND Dooku's former apprentice, wishing he was here now to help. Kenobi spits out that Qui-Gon would never join him, but can he even be sure of that? Qui-Gon was never in total lockstep with the Jedi Council. Obi-Wan knows this because he was tasked with training Anakin Skywalker, the very by-product of Qui-Gon's defiance of the Council. So, when Count Dooku asserts that there is a good chance Qui-Gon would have left the Jedi as well and maybe even helped Dooku, it rings true. As does Dooku's request to Obi-Wan, "You must join me, Obi-Wan, and together we can destroy the Sith."

It's a defining moment for both Obi-Wan and Count Dooku.

Time and time again, the prequels and the prequel era put forth the idea that the venerable and honorable Jedi Order has moved away from their core principles. Yoda talks about the arrogance of younger Jedi. Many question the Jedi's eventual military involvement in the Clone War. Mace Windu talks openly about their connection to the Force being diminished. Faced with the full weight of all these tough past and future truths, Obi-Wan Kenobi stands behind his own core principles. That's the one thing he can trust. It's not that he doesn't believe Dooku at this point, it's that he won't bend. He refuses to join. Obi-Wan will stand in the light in an effort to clear out the dark.

Dooku had formed the Separatists to fight against the Republic, and the Republic became the Empire, something the Jedi couldn't stop because they were too complacent to see it. Dooku saw this coming and his intentions may not have been bad, at least initially. In some ways, he was the first rebel. However, Sir Christopher Lee, the late legendary actor who played Dooku, described him as amoral, not concerned with right or wrong, only power. So that makes one think that maybe he really did want to recruit Obi-Wan? Maybe he wanted to take down the Sith even though he currently was one? For Dooku, switching sides and titles was just the next means to his own end. But here now, as he is refused by Obi-Wan, he stands behind *his* own core principles. In one of the best acting moments of the series, Sir Christopher Lee's Count Dooku takes a beat and nods, confirming his choice. He faced these truths long ago and lost his trust then. Power became his guide. Power is what Dooku trusts. So, he walks away. Back into the dark, away from the light.

Star Wars is a story of good versus evil, but here on the planet Geonosis on the verge of war, we're reminded that sometimes you need to have your trust shaken to find out where you really stand.

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# THE BALLAD OF LUKE LARS

## WHEN THE FORCE CALLED OUT A HERO

*The Last Jedi* novelization

Author: Jason Fry

The Force is not here to play games. It has no time for your prophecies of the Chosen One. It doesn't care if you are the most powerful Jedi that ever Space Wizerd. It doesn't even give a damn if you shut off your connection to it. Doesn't matter. The Force will find you, always.

Jason Fry's novelization of *The Last Jedi* got the fanbase buzzing by giving us a haunting vision of what could have been in *A New Hope*. What if Luke Skywalker had watched the hologram of the princess in distress, heard Obi-Wan's request to join him on this damn fool idealistic crusade, and, instead of going with him to Mos Eisley, had stayed behind and not gotten involved? Big questions that had a big answer in Fry's prologue.

It was a Star Wars fanatic's dream. Fry presented this evocative alternate reality in which Luke married his girlfriend Camie, (infamously cut from *A New Hope* but still in the 1977 novelization), his best friend Biggs had died "somewhere unimaginably far away," Obi-Wan was discovered by the Empire, and Princess Leia executed. The Empire wins, and all the while Luke stays on Tatooine with his wife. He takes over the moisture farm he was raised on, reaches the quotas for the Empire and pays his water tax to Jabba the Hutt, all

the while living his life wondering about that princess and her call for help.

After this came out, Star Wars news media ran wild with the juicy, misleading headlines of Luke Skywalker having a wife (he didn't) while spending his days in isolation on Ahch-To dreaming about this life that never was. As if it was some wistful daydream of a simpler life. Wrong. All wrong. The Force called him out.

Luke ran away and when we find him at the end of *The Force Awakens*, he had worked his way back to the start again. He was on a faraway planet, doing mundane chores, and disconnected from the bigger world around him. Except, now, instead of staring at the twin suns and wondering what was out there for him, he was waiting for them to set for good. Luke Skywalker had failed.

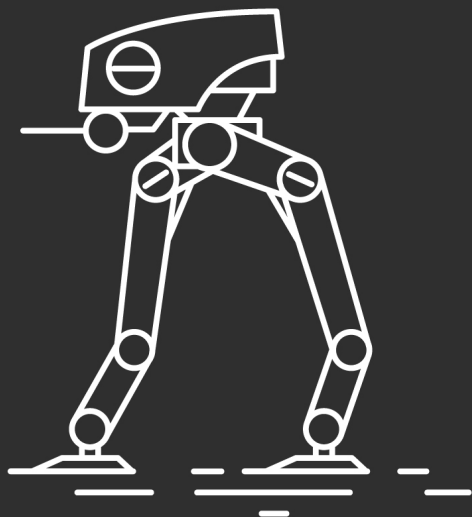
Now, why is it good or exciting that Luke Skywalker failed? Why is this a reason to love Star Wars? This is our hero, mind you. Well, it is a reason to love Star Wars because it reminds us that Star Wars has room for this failure. Like us, the grand hero CAN fail, there are layers to this journey, but he can choose to be better. (Remember Luke's very own lesson to Del Meeko on Pillio.) And this wasn't just Luke getting that chance to choose again, this was a sharp rebuke. If you had some issues with Luke's decisions in the last years of his life, then you weren't alone; the Force did too.

However, the Force couldn't get to Luke in the traditional way. No Force ghosts, mysterious voices, or dark tree caves. It needed to circumvent the walls he had erected around his heart, so it found him in a dream. It was a warning. A storm was coming, and he was going to be in it. He could get involved or stay out of it as he pleased. The Force wants you to choose and it can't make that choice for you. As Obi-Wan said to him years ago, "You must do what you feel is right, of course."

Back then, staying out of it would have meant the deaths of Biggs, Kenobi, and Leia. It would have led to the capture of Artoo and Threepio. Not only would Alderaan have been destroyed but the home worlds of Ackbar and Mon Mothma as well. The Empire would have won. Skywalker would have lived his days out as Luke Lars, a humble moisture farmer, living under the mislabeled peace of the Galactic Empire. The Force was not so subtly showing Luke the potential cost back *then* as a reminder of what was at stake *now*. Something—and let's not forget—someone—Rey—was coming to try and pull him back into the fold.

Luke wasn't pulled back in easily. He needed every bit of Rey's presence in his life to challenge his dejected mindset and that makes his final choice in *The Last Jedi* even that much more effective. The choice Luke makes in the end, that powerful sacrifice of peace and purpose, can be traced directly back to this prologue. *That* is why it's to be celebrated. It's the very foundation on which Luke's final decision is built and connects to the very core of our knowledge of the Force.

There is a promise we all learn very early on in our Star Wars fandom. The one Obi-Wan communicated to Luke in the Death Star trench run. The Force will be with you, always, whether you want it to be or not. This prologue is the fulfillment of that promise and the realization of its depth. We've always looked at that promise from the vantage point of good times, but the Star Wars story isn't about the finish line of victory. It's about getting there. Luke Skywalker **had** failed, and he was done with the Force. But, thankfully, the Force was not done with him.



## INTERLUDE #3

### YOUR FAVORITE STAR WARS CHARACTER...

Han Solo was my guy. I gravitated to him right from the start and certainly wasn't alone. That lovable scoundrel with a good heart pulls in a lot of fans. Dashing and daring. Witty and carefree. Han Solo had the coolest spaceship, the best friend in the galaxy, and got the princess in the end. All of that made sense to me as a young fan living in the suburbs but dreaming of those Wars in the Stars.

As I got older, I found even more of myself in Han. The internal struggle of who you want to be versus who you know you should be. The realities of your decisions and changes smacking you straight in the face and the constant fight with the desire to go back to what you know. And, yes, even the grumpiness. I see myself in him.

Han Solo is my favorite Star Wars character, but who is yours?

That question has always been fun to answer because Star Wars has always offered us wonderful choices. For every answer of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, there are also those that will say Salacious B Crumb and Wuher the cantina bartender. You can find yourself in the Imperial officers or droid bounty hunters or even Bo-Shek, the pilot that seemingly turned down Obi-Wan Kenobi for a ride off Tatooine. Who your favorite Star Wars character is has always been a fun question to get, but now the answer is even more important.

This new era of modern Star Wars canon has brought us an impressive amount of new, thought-provoking, inspirational, and diverse characters. And never clearer than in the books and comics

where fans have many different choices. Now more than ever, you can find yourself in Star Wars.

There are great moments found within these materials that deserve a spotlight. Some of the highlights include Doctor Aphra, the free-spirited archeologist working with Vader, the criminal underworld, and her own murderous droids, sharing a kiss with the conflicted Imperial officer Magna Tolvan. There is Sana Starros, Aphra's ex-love, stepping down off of her ship, pointing a blaster at Han and Leia, and proclaiming she was Han's wife and immediately taking her rightful place in the story. Norra Wexley, the mother of *The Force Awakens* character Snap, became the face of the post-Empire movement in the Aftermath series while Rae Sloane became the face of the changing Empire. There is Peekpa the Ewok hacker who joined Han and Chewie's adventures post-*Return of the Jedi* and continuously displayed her technical skills while others overlooked her. We learn of Evaan Verlaine, the Alderaanian Y-wing pilot that survived the Battle of Yavin and flew away with Luke, Wedge, and the *Millennium Falcon*. And there is Sinjir Rath Velus, the former Imperial loyalty officer who found a new purpose with the Rebels of the burgeoning New Republic and at the side of slicer Conder Kyl.

The varied collection of new characters continues to pour out of this new modern era of books and comics and take their place in the hearts of the fans right next to those on the big screens and in the TV shows. This is now a bigger galaxy to match a larger fandom. And there is always room to grow. These days the question of who your favorite Star Wars character is means more than it ever has before because the answers are becoming as varied as the audience always has been.



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# QUEEN AMIDALA RETURNS HOME

## THE DEFINING MOMENT FOR A TRUE HERO

*Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Queen Amidala was elected to serve her people, not rule them. So, when she finds herself embroiled in a fruitless political battle in the capital of the Republic and running into a brick wall of bureaucracy and corruption, she makes a character-defining decision that no one would expect the fourteen-year-old queen to make. She goes back home to unite two cultures, fight side by side with them, and, for one moment, outsmart the man at the center of it all. Queen Padmé Amidala Nabberrie was her own kind of hero.

Make no mistake, Sheev Palpatine, that corrupt son and Senator of Naboo, was great at keeping himself and his plan a few steps ahead of everyone else. Driven by his quest for power and all things dark side, the man who would one day become the Emperor hatched a pretty effective plan to take over the galaxy. Jedi and politicians alike fell for his deceptions. Palpatine was in control and understandably confident.

When speaking of his queen, Palpatine proclaimed, “Queen Amidala is young and naive. You will find controlling her will not

be difficult.” Thus far he had not found any real opposition when it came to carrying out his secret plot to take all the power. Whether it was the gullible heads of the Trade Federation, the beleaguered Republic Chancellor Finis Vallorum, or those oh-so-insightful Jedi, Palpatine was pulling all the strings and pulling them easily.

Then Queen Amidala, already revealed to be a free thinker while on Tatooine disguised as the handmaiden Padmé, arrives on Coruscant and becomes the next pawn in Palpatine’s plan. It works. There is no denying that. He fans the flames of her passion for the well-being of her people, whispers in her ear, and she calls for the vote of no confidence in Vallorum. This paves the way for Palpatine’s ascension.

Yet something is not sitting right with the queen. The promise of politics being for the goodwill of the people has been broken right in front of her. An army of droids has taken over her capital city and the Senate wants more proof. She feels frustrated and unheard. Not just from the Republic Senate, but from the Jedi as well. (Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan didn’t exactly heed all of her advice at the beginning of all this.) As Jar Jar Binks talks of the grand Gungan army hidden beneath the sea ready to proudly fight, the Queen of the Naboo, the people who have long helped fuel the segregation of the Gungans and Naboo, realizes that it is time to unite as one planet. She needs to stop following everyone else’s path. Playing the game with their playbook. She’s ready to break from the troubling history of her culture. She’s ready to be heard. She’s ready to fight. The queen is going to go home to stand with her people.

This is the moment in which Queen Padmé Amidala cements herself as a strong leader. This the through line to Princess Leia and her compassion-filled actions during the Rebellion and leadership during the Resistance. This is the gold standard for heroes in Star

Wars. Don't do what is expected, do what is needed for the good of others.

When she calmly tells Palpatine—chuffed because he is now one step closer to becoming chancellor—that his arena is here and her place is back on Naboo with her people, the well-crafted facade of the secret Sith Lord cracks. Yes, it's just for a moment, but it does crack. One of the strengths of Palpatine is adapting to wrinkles and obstacles to his plan. He does that until the last wrinkle in what he foresaw sends him falling to his death in *Return of the Jedi*. So, it *does* serve him well to have Amidala gone and starting a resistance on her own planet. He definitely smiles like this was meant to be, but for one glorious frame, his eyes tell you otherwise. She may be young, and she might have been naive, but you will have a hard time controlling her. This makes Padmé one of Palpatine's greatest threats.

*The Clone Wars* animated series helped to expand the character of Padmé and the rivalry with Palpatine. We get to see her practice what she preached in the halls of the Senate and the fields of battle through great speeches and brave acts. Season three episodes “Heroes on Both Sides” and “Pursuit of Peace” come to mind as Padmé leads the opposition to the war from within by embracing her Separatist mentor Mina Bonteri, pursuing peace, and delivering the best political speech of the franchise. Once again, she's taking the path of most resistance, the path outside the normal way of thinking. Once again, she's foiling Palpatine's greater plan and making him have to change his direction on the fly. This would reach a fever pitch with her connection and influence on the apprentice he coveted and come to its own tragic conclusion later. However, from the moment she made her own decision to return to Naboo and up until her final pleas to Anakin, Padmé was a powerfully (and dangerously) independent character.

For far too long, Padmé Amidala was overlooked and underrated. By fans, her colleagues, and the villains trying to control her. The focus was, sometimes understandably (this is Star Wars after all), on lightsabers, starfighters, and the chosen heroes promised to bring balance to it all. But, at this moment, Padmé took her rightful place next to them and brought her dedication to diplomacy, democracy, and liberty for all with her. She is a queen and a senator. A wife and mother. A leader and a hero. And Padmé Amidala Naberrie did it all on her own terms.

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**THE HORROR OF VADER****THE HALLWAY MASSACRE***Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

Sometimes it's easy to forget that Darth Vader is a bad guy. From about the midpoint of *Revenge of the Sith* to the last few moments of *Return of the Jedi*, the soul that once was Anakin Skywalker is bad. I mean, sorry, he IS conflicted, still at war with his former self, and never fully trusting of his dark master. Yes. There are layers there. Especially now. However, we all know the truth: Darth Vader has done horrible things since joining the Sith. From killing Younglings to hunting down Jedi to helping to oppress and enslave most of the galaxy, Vader has been one evil villain. He is a bad guy.

Yet, when rumors started circulating that Darth Vader would be appearing in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, a groundswell of anticipation started to build. While it was widely believed he would not be a main player in the story, the hope was that we all would get to see Vader "in action." This would be the Darth Vader we all dreamed about seeing as a kid. And we wouldn't just see it in an animated show or read about it in a book. This was going to be Vader in his prime on the big screen. Weird when you stop and think about it because we ALSO knew that *Rogue One* would be very close to the events of *A New Hope*, so it would make little sense that Vader's prime didn't also include *A New Hope* and *The Empire*

*Strikes Back*. (We'll allow for the idea that he was slowing down a bit by *Return of the Jedi*. Tired of his boss, looking for a retirement plan.) But, in truth, that's playing around with the in-story aspect. The subtext of this anticipation was that we wanted to see Darth Vader swing his lightsaber and choking his foes in the era of more modern filmmaking. For all of its advancements of the film industry, the original trilogy was also of its time. Vader is almost reserved in the trilogy. Striding menacingly around Star Destroyer command bridges, standing ominously in front of his foes, or sitting in cockpits killing Luke's best friends, Darth Vader doesn't, you know—follow me on this because I don't mean to be sacrilegious—do much. We *wanted* to see Vader in action.

Well...see him in action we did, and it was absolutely, undeniably, unflinchingly horrific. Just like we've always wanted.

As we know, Vader appears earlier in the movie at his castle. However, at the end of the day, he was just taking a business meeting with an employee. Orson Krennic has essentially been called in to talk about his poor work performance. We want more from Vader. A lot more.

The story of *Rogue One* rolls on and we almost forget about Vader. There's a lot going on. Rebel spies are racing around, trying to steal the Death Star plans, Imperials are actually hitting their targets on the ground, and the Rebel fleet knocking Star Destroyers out of the sky. Then Grand Moff Tarkin takes the Death Star over to the battle and mentions that Vader will be "taking care" of the Rebel fleet.

Gulp.

The entire audience sat up a little straighter. No sodas were sipped, and all snacks put on hold. Darth Vader was on his way. Your mind immediately started speculating wildly what this could mean. Is

Vader going to fly around in his TIE Advance, cleaning up Rebel X-wings and Y-wings? Is he going to drop to the planet's surface and try to rip the Death Star plans out of Jyn Erso's hands? Is Darth Vader going to use the Force to simply crush Rebel cruisers like this was some sort of video game? What is Darth Vader going to do?!?!?

Then, well, nothing happens. Or at least nothing with Vader. The battle rages on and the Rebels actually manage to beam the stolen plans safely up to the Rebel ship above and try to escape. The Death Star fires on its own base and people and our heroes die in the blast on the beach of Scarif. It's over. The battle has been won and the Rebels start to get out of there and fast, starfighters and ships alike jumping to lightspeed. Well, I guess this movie is over—

BAM.

Vader's flagship the *Devastator* emerges from hyperspace. Rebel ships crash into it and shatter upon contact. The battle is NOT over. Darth Vader has work to do.

At the moment the story jumps into the Rebel ship the *Profundity* and then into the familiar, pristine white hallways of the Blockade Runner we know belongs to Princess Leia, we get a sense of what's coming. Alarms blare, fueling our anticipation and, honestly, our fear. Rebel soldiers, dressed in the blue, black, and gray we first saw in 1977 (or whenever you had the pleasure of first seeing *A New Hope*) have the plans, but run into a malfunctioning door. They're trapped and turn to face a sound in the darkness. A sound we all grew up hearing and associating with THE villain of our favorite galaxy. A crackle and hiss. That red lightsaber appears.

What transpires next is Star Wars crossing into a new genre. Mark Reilly of Collider Video once said in their old show *Collider Nightmares* that this was pure horror. The Rebels are trapped, and

pure evil is advancing. There is nothing they can do. Vader hacks them into pieces, pulling blasters away with the Force, choking them, destroying them, and slicing a poor Rebel in two. The screams in the darkness fade away until no one remains. The plans make it through the door and another soldier races away with them. One of the last and most effective shots we see is outside of the darkness. In that familiar bright, white hallway, Darth Vader is loose and, as a Rebel trooper crouches in fear, Vader, the bad guy we grew up not-so-secretly admiring, swings his crimson blade down right on him. In this era of modern filmmaking, it is all very real and palpable. It IS pure horror. Darth Vader is a monster. Just like we always knew he was.



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# A HERO'S RESOLVE AND A VILLAIN'S FEAR

## REY AND KYLO REN'S FIRST CONFRONTATION

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

You have to love when Star Wars surprises you. Far too often, audiences can be waiting for the big surprise, those mind-shattering revelations that you didn't see coming, but sometimes the surprise is subtler. Deeper. And you sit up in your seat, relishing in the fact that you're seeing something different that you know you'll need to dig into more. One such surprise took place in *The Force Awakens* and continues to reward us as its implications play out in the continuing saga. It all centers around Kylo Ren's first defeat. No, not the one on the crumbling surface of Starkiller Base. Rey first defeated him deep inside the infrastructure of that First Order superweapon when Kylo's interrogation of her backfired, emboldening her and giving us a connection between the hero and villain that we had never experienced before.

Captured and at the mercy of the First Order, Rey was in a bad place when she awoke to the image of Kylo Ren staring back at her while she was strapped to a torture device. Taunting and cocksure,

Kylo Ren is what we were expecting at this point in the movie. The dark side-influenced baddie with a black cape and red lightsaber. He's powerful and he knows it. Kylo Ren is pretty sure he knows who Kylo Ren is. So, he does what he, and we, know bad guys do: he tries to take what isn't his. In this case, Rey's mind.

After casually taking off his mask because he thinks he doesn't need it, Kylo begins mucking about Rey's mind and we learn a lot about Rey here. She's fresh off her frightening Force vision at Maz's Castle, so we already know a bit of her state of mind, but now it's clear to us and Kylo. She's lonely, isolated, feeling completely inadequate and out of place. Everything that makes her weak is now on display, but it's the nature of this discovery that is darker than expected. Like Poe before her, every truth about her was just ripped from her mind. Taken by force. And, unlike Poe, it's not just information for use in a war, it's who she is. Her very being. Rey is no longer just a hero facing obstacles, Rey is a young woman losing a part of herself. Every truth about her was just ripped from her mind.

Yet, as the sequel trilogy teaches, darkness rises and light comes out to meet it.

In this most vulnerable state, Rey discovers a resolve she didn't know she had. Yes, this is Star Wars, but this isn't just about Force powers, training levels, and her purpose in the grand scheme of it all, that comes later. This moment is about a young woman finding a personal strength she previously couldn't imagine. And with that strength, she strikes back.

The situation turns on Kylo and he is now exposed. She is now in his mind. And just like that...the course of our new villain is altered. His biggest fear, his biggest inadequacy, is on display. He worships the twisted legacy of Darth Vader. He wants to turn completely away from everything he was raised—and maybe born—to be and

continue an empire of evil. But he doesn't think he can. He doesn't have the strength to do it. And this isn't Snoke learning this. That's his master, his new mentor, and the Supreme Leader already knows that. This knowledge is now in the hands of his new rival. The creature in a mask, once so sure of himself, so convinced of his position of power, is now a fearful pretender. This is most definitely Kylo's first loss.

This is the kind of surprise to cherish. The story-shattering revelations can come later, but this is a story building revelation. Our hero is growing stronger from a place we didn't see coming and the path of our villain has changed. We knew he might not be fully formed, but this isn't an origin story—this is a deconstruction and, because of that, Kylo Ren becomes more dangerous than we previously could have imagined. His confidence is shaken, his footing unsure, and he is going to do anything to convince himself that he is the monster he wants to be.

Though Snoke would soon bind their minds through his dark powers, this is the first connection between them. They have seen each other as no one else has. Forget all those juicy fanfiction daydreams, this connection is far more intimate. Kylo and Rey are not just adversaries, they are, whether they like it or not, confidants. And those are the implications they'll have to deal with. In this giant, sweeping epic saga, they have no one else that truly understands them except each other. Each walking around knowing the weakness of the other one, an emotional weapon they could use to help each other or destroy each other.

What began as an interrogation scene, the captured and the captor, a tried and true sequence in Star Wars, quickly turned into something we didn't expect. A hero and villain fought, and each gained the power of raw truth. We were reminded that in Star Wars, thankfully, it doesn't always go the way you think.

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## **"ARE YOU WITH ME?"**

### **MON MOTHMA, THE MOTHER OF REBELLION**

*Star Wars Rebels*, Season 3, Episode 18, "Secret Cargo"

Writer: Matt Michnonetz

Director: Bosco Ng

"Are you with me?" she asked of a galaxy needing a spark of hope among the darkness of the Empire. She was on the run, branded a traitor, and unsure if anyone was listening. She was hoping to provide inspiration but ended up solidifying an alliance. She is Mon Mothma, the mother of the Rebellion, and this is her moment.

Star Wars has inspirational moments to be sure. There are uplifting words and insightful lessons, but, if we're being fair, it sometimes lacks those rallying cries and big speeches that other properties liberally splash throughout their stories. Yes, there are great speeches. Padmé absolutely has a few gems in *The Clone Wars*, Luke's "I am not the last Jedi" moment is great, and I'm sure if you translated Chief Chirpa a bit better in *Return of the Jedi* you'd get motivated to defend Bright Tree Village. They are there, so hold your angry letters to the editor. It's just that there is no Star Wars version of King Théoden rallying the Riders of Rohan or Aragorn's "For Frodo" moment before charging toward the Black Gate. There isn't a Tyrion Lannister picking up the slack for a cowardly king before defending King's Landing or William Wallace in *Braveheart*, being—well—brave. "May the Force be with you" is sometimes all

we get and that is why Mon Mothma's speech in season three of *Star Wars Rebels* stands tall among the rest.

Her speech was a senator speaking out against corruption to the point of having to go into hiding. It was a public decree that trying to solve this conflict within the confines of politics was no longer an option. It was her wondering if she was alone and getting the answer that she was surrounded by allies. There is great significance to this speech as it is the start of the formalized Rebellion.

Prior to this moment, the Rebellion was a collection of cells, each working toward the same general goal, yes, but each with their own styles, methods, and missions. They had no leader. Here, Mon Mothma becomes that.

Sure, there will still be debates, internal power struggles, and the troublesome question of what to do about Saw Gerrera and his violent Partisans. But now there is one united front, a Rebel Alliance here to take down the Empire.

Mon Mothma has always held a curious place in the Star Wars saga ever since her first appearance in *Return of the Jedi*, where she famously bemoaned that "many Bothans died to bring us this information." She was clearly an important presence in that briefing room scene, but who was she? In a franchise often devoid of female characters, particularly back in 1983, it would be nice to know her place in the history of the saga. George Lucas had designs on answering that himself when he cast actress Genevieve O'Reilly as a young Mothma opposite Natalie Portman's Padmé and Jimmy Smits' Bail Organa in some scenes eventually cut from *Revenge of the Sith*. He made sure she was a key figure in *The Clone Wars* animated series, but here in *Star Wars Rebels* she truly shines and gives Star Wars a great rallying speech.

Everyone in the Rebellion took a risk. They put their lives on the line for this cause of freedom, the return of democracy, and the end of an evil regime. However, in order for this fight to be legitimized, it needed one person with everything to lose to step out the shadows and lead the charge into the light. This speech didn't happen on the field of battle with swords drawn. It wasn't followed by thunderous cheers and a mighty roar of an army. Instead, a resigning senator humbly broadcast her truth to anyone who would listen. She would not rest until the Republic had been restored. "Are you with me?" Mon Mothma asked, and one by one spaceships appeared before her. Each one coming out of hyperspace was a new ally answering, resoundingly, yes.

## 36

**“FREE US OR DIE”****LUKE SKYWALKER GOES FULL JEDI***Star Wars: Episode VI—The Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan &amp; George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

Luke Skywalker stood on the plank extending from the Skiff over the mouth of the Sarlacc Pit. Everyone on Jabba's sail barge was watching and waiting for the demise of this man dressed in black claiming to be a Jedi. As he stepped to the very edge, his doom a footstep away, Skywalker and his friends were asked by Jabba's pressganged translator C-3PO if they wanted to beg for mercy. Skywalker confidently proclaimed, "Jabba, this is your last chance. Free us or die."

Everyone laughed.

Then everyone died.

Several times weekly as it turns out, because my friends and I reenacted this sequence again and again on the playground, Monday through Friday, like clockwork, for what seemed like years. We'd plop down at the lunch table, race through our juice boxes, apple wedges, and crustless sandwiches so we could run out to this big wooden contraption in the middle of the playground. About six feet off the ground at its peak, it was a long rectangle made of old wood and a metal slide. It was a monstrosity and **perfect** to be

used as one of Jabba's Skiffs. This was the 1980s, of course, so there was little concern about students of the world getting branch-sized splinters or rust-induced infections. Just play nice.

And play nice we did. If nice included slaughtering Jabba and his henchmen like our heroes Luke, Han, Leia, Chewie, and Lando (no one agreed to play Artoo!). We assigned the parts ("Today **you** get to be Luke, I'll be Han."). We got set in position. And then we relived the entire Sarlacc Pit sequence until the recess bell rang. If you were struck by an imaginary lightsaber, you leaped down six feet to the sand below. If you were playing the part of Lando, you crawled around below while the kids playing Han and Chewie literally dangled over the playset, trying to rescue you. What fun. What memories. What injuries we all nearly suffered. But we were kids, and this was Star Wars.

Yes, Star Wars is for kids. It is that universal lesson in morality designed to enlighten kids everywhere. There is good and there is evil, and your choices often dictate which direction you head to. But like the proverbial spoon full of sugar making the medicine go down, these big lessons are wrapped in the spellbinding actions of our heroes.

We didn't know that we were acting out the choices of a good guy saving his friends, repaying a debt to Han, and taking down a giant in the criminal underworld. We didn't focus on whether or not Luke's actions were born of protection or aggression and which one was the true Jedi way. We were just mesmerized by what we saw.

And as we should be. The escape from Jabba's evil clutches had everything we had been waiting for since Luke first got handed a lightsaber. Crazy, Force-fueled leaps, kicks and punches, deflected laser blasts, and that magnificent green lightsaber serving as a beacon of all that is good with our hero. It is a video game sequence



in motion. And while the concept of what it means to be a Jedi is layered and deep, you can never escape our desire for the Jedi to be Errol Flynn-like swashbucklers leaping from ship to ship and sending the villains to their doom.

And Luke wasn't alone! Princess Leia becomes the actual Huttlayer, Artoo zaps Salacious B Crumb, and Han, Chewie, and Lando engage in a tension-filled rescue over the hungry monster buried within the Dune Sea. Everywhere you look, there is the kind of Star Wars action tailor-made for the unbridled excitement of youth. This is Luke Skywalker going full Jedi like never before and, in some ways, never again.

Which is why this sequence matters so much to the young fan in all of us. Luke eventually runs off to face Vader and the Emperor on the Death Star and, in the process, becomes an actual Jedi. That's the more important moment for the life and times of Luke Skywalker. One that connects with Lucas' take on the Jedi losing their way in the prequel era and on up to the choices Luke makes at the end of his life. However, the throne room sequence and the themes emerging from there are darker, more nuanced, and, at times, somber, whereas the momentum and action presented here above the Sarlacc Pit is easier to digest, understand, and translate into youthful joy.

This is the legacy of the Sarlacc Pit sequence. It is Star Wars displaying its 1930s' serial adventure story DNA in full vibrant color and atmosphere. It's not an academic look at our hero, it's our hero in action. And that is what inspires countless generations over and over. We watched that Luke Skywalker on screen and took him to the playgrounds and backyards of our youth. We bravely made the choice to save our friends and save the day just like Luke, and then, as George Lucas planned, we took those lessons with us throughout the rest of our lives.

35

## **SHE LIVES**

### **THE LAST MOMENTS OF BAIL AND BREHA ORGANA**

“Eclipse”

*From a Certain Point of View*

Author: Madeleine Roux

I cried.

I just read it again, the short story “Eclipse” by Madeleine Roux, and I cried one more time.

Tears flowed freely the very first time I read this achingly beautiful entry in the *From a Certain Point of View* anthology, so I shouldn’t be surprised. Shouldn’t have my breath taken away as well, but yet here we are.

In preparation for every piece in this book, I have rewatched, reread, reanalyzed, re-everything’d everything from the Star Wars universe that is covered here. That is followed by a hatching of a great plan for each essay that would make General Crix Madine proud. Each point is crafted and mulled over (Oh, there is plenty of mulling going on). Each piece is a finely tuned roadmap leading toward a reason we love Star Wars. I had one for this entry. I really did.

We were going to talk about how this story, along with Claudia Gray’s work in *Leia: Princess of Alderaan*, finally sheds some light on

the true nature and character of the pacifist Queen of Alderaan. How it is illuminating to see how much of Breha's soul made it into Leia. Strong and kind, she was a leader not *of* the people, but *with* the people. We were going to spend time on the importance of motherhood in Star Wars. How Breha Organa's influence was just as important as Bail's and how fulfilling it is to spend this time with her, even just for a touching few pages.

We were going to discuss how the tension builds beautifully in this story, building and building to an emotional crescendo you know is coming, but can never be prepared for. How we get to see Breha gracefully dealing with the mundane duties of leadership while the stress of not knowing the fate of her husband and daughter is tearing her up. A trait Leia would exhibit over and over. A trait she clearly learned from her mother.

I had some great stuff planned about the return of Bail Organa. How he rushes back into the capital and into his wife's arms, allowing us to see them as two people in love and in need of each other. How it is so subtly crafted you start to see yourself in the story. It evokes the feeling of holding your loved one close. A safe spot from everything that rages on around you. As Breha Organa hears the news that her daughter's ship was destroyed and her whereabouts unknown, you grieve as a parent. This is Star Wars, but it feels like us.

I really wanted to write about how the destruction of Alderaan is only experienced at a distance in *A New Hope*. Mostly an emotional distance at that. It's a flash on screen. A brief moment that forever alters the galaxy and the princess trying to liberate it, that never fully takes hold of us because we are only floating around it. Here, we go in closer and feel it. It grips us. It terrifies us. It rumbles under our feet. This is a veritable horror story. The monster is lurking

outside. An approaching evil. And we can do nothing about it. You just have to read on.

Much should be said about the grip of dread that encircles your heart as you read about the Death Star's arrival above Alderaan, an unnatural eclipse above a beautiful, peaceful planet of pacifists that quickly becomes a target of opportunity. It's a haunting companion piece to some of the visuals in *Rogue One*. When the Death Star arrives, the lights go out, forever.

I wanted to write all of this stuff—I'm using 'stuff' here because I'm flummoxed—because I wanted to be a prim and proper writer that can deftly explain his feelings, insight, and appreciation of sixteen of the finest pages of a Star Wars story I've ever read.

But I can't.

I can't because Madeleine Roux wrote the most heart-wrenching, gut-punching Star Wars poetry ever. I can never—I mean never—watch *A New Hope* again and **not** think of the final moments of Bail and Breha Organa. After you read "Eclipse," you cannot watch Vader tighten his grip around Leia, forcing her to watch the destruction of her people, her planet, and her parents, without thinking about Bail wrapping his arms around Breha as the Death Star gets ready to fire. As you stare into the eyes of a young princess about to be left alone in this galaxy at war, you will always think of the final words Bail says to his wife. "She lives." And as you watch the planet explode on screen, leaving the princess no choice but to find the will to save the galaxy and the strength to lead it, you will never forget the final words Breha says to her husband. "I know." You cannot watch the sequence you've seen in *A New Hope* for years and years and separate it from the final haunting moments of Bail and Breha Organa. Roux writes, "She felt her husband's warmth, his breath on her neck, then the scent of ash and smoke, and in the next

moment, oblivion.” The Death Star destroyed Alderaan in seconds, but those words make the pain eternal. They are two points of view, forever intertwined as one. You will always think about it...

...and cry.

34

**"FINALLY"****THE KISS OF KANAN AND HERA***Star Wars Rebels*, Season 4, Episode 7, "Kindred"

Writers: Dave Filoni &amp; Henry Gilroy

Director: Sergio Paez

"Will they or won't they?" is a tried and true dynamic for a lot of storytelling. Two leads circling around love for a long period of time until their passions explode into a kiss. Add a laugh track and you've got at least one season of a hit sitcom. *Star Wars Rebels* presented us with that dynamic early on with Kanan and Hera, but what made it work so well wasn't a case of "will they/ won't they," it was "can they?"

When we first meet Kanan Jarrus in Jonathan Jackson Miller's novel *A New Dawn*, the former Jedi Padawan known as Caleb Dume is far from the child he was and the man he wanted to be. He's a bottom-dwelling, bar-hopping, skirt-chasing cowboy actually. He has a ponytail for Force's sake! His journey through the events of *Star Wars Rebels* isn't just one of self-discovery and returning to the Jedi way he HAD to ditch because of the events of Order 66 and the rise of the Galactic Empire. No, it's more like Kanan Jarrus was going through a rehabilitation. Who he was had faded away over time, due in part to circumstance first, yes, but more so because he masked his fear of losing who he was with all the trappings and vices he had been trained to turn away from. He was buried beneath them and had to go through a slow process of digging

through the mire to rebuild himself. That makes any possible romantic attachment to Hera a risk. Attachment is forbidden! Just ask Anakin, he'll tell you! Does Kanan love Hera? Of course, he does, no question, but can he?

For her part, Hera Syndulla is the daughter of a famed revolutionary, Cham Syndulla, and was born into this Rebellion. Though that situation is not always clear and easy, it does mean that she's felt the oppressive nature of the Empire up close. She started out a fighter and soon became a leader. She had to. It was her legacy to continue and she's great at it. When she first meets Kanan, it's not just a matter of her not having time for him in some sort of shallow duty to her job. She's not trying for a promotion and doesn't need the distraction like this is a rom-com movie on Netflix. She's helping to launch a Rebellion and either you're helping her or you're not on her spaceship. While Kanan does break through that barrier, the goal for both becomes freedom. Nothing else. Does Hera love Kanan? Of course, she does, but can she?

Through all the seasons of *Star Wars Rebels*, we watch as Kanan and Hera continue their growth. Kanan inches closer and closer to that Jedi he needs to be. Hera grows from a leader of a small rebel cell to an invaluable warrior in a greater alliance. We know they love each. They know they love each. But, through it all, that question of "can they?" floats over their heads like a tantalizing peek into a life they both deserve. And so, they finally kiss...

There are great kisses in Star Wars like Han and Leia, Padmé and Anakin, Dr. Aphra and Captain Tolvan, or Kylo and Rey (Kidding. Not yet. Or ever. Or maybe.), but there is nothing gained by applying a ranking system to them. They each represent something different and special to those situations and characters. What shines through the kiss of Kanan and Hera is how after all this time and anticipation—especially ours—it was so simple, direct, and real.

It was quick and sudden. No long gazes (they came before). No big gestures. No sweeping “vistas” behind them. It was mere moments before a battle, mid-conversation, and in front of their team, which by then had become their family (bonus points to Zeb’s proud smile upon seeing it). The kiss of Kanan and Hera wasn’t a proclamation and the beginning of a romance. Their kiss was a confirmation of all the feelings that had come before this moment and the natural progression of a relationship that had already been in place, an equal partnership that, they both finally realized, had become the most important part of their respective, individual journeys. It’s the Star Wars kiss from another galaxy that was the most realistic.

The love of Kanan and Hera was tragically doomed, but nothing that transpired after this moment could erase the power of this kiss and the joy behind it. It was the answer fans had been wanting from the beginning. Can Kanan and Hera share a kiss? Yes. They had to.



## 33

**YODA'S THEME****THE SOUNDS OF ENLIGHTENMENT***Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Composer: John Williams

All the words one can use to describe the magic of John Williams and his music have been used up. There are none left for me. Sorry about that. From other books and essays, to magazine articles and podcasts, there aren't any new ways to describe John Williams' work. George Lucas calls him the secret sauce to the success of Star Wars and, well, that kind of sums it up. So instead of reading about it, let's listen to "Yoda's Theme" and celebrate the sounds of enlightenment.

(space left intentionally blank so you can go listen to "Yoda's Theme")

So...turns out I am contractually obligated to try and use *some* words to describe the work of John Williams and why specifically "Yoda's Theme" drives home all that we learn from Star Wars. Let's take a shot.

The various themes of Star Wars, those specifically crafted for the main characters, bring something unique and special to the story. A classic like "Binary Sunset" brings wanderlust and hope while "Leia's Theme" brings strength and determination. Newer fare like "The Adventures of Han" finally captures the smuggler's eternal

thirst for danger and “Rey’s Theme” sounds like someone setting out anew. Any one of those themes (and more) deserve their own entry and, yes, we’re boiling their meanings down to their central themes while Williams embeds many varied ideas and emotions into each theme, depending on the context. But they are all reasons we love Star Wars. “Yoda’s Theme,” though, brings something not found in the other themes that connects straight to the core of Star Wars: enlightenment and the comforting feeling of revelation.

When Luke Skywalker goes through his training on Dagobah, it’s not what he expects. It’s harder, more challenging, and tremendously darker than he could have imagined...and that includes Dagobah itself. In keeping with the theme of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the tone of his journey changes just as the tone of the war has changed for the Rebels. For Luke, there is more to learn than just using the Force to destroy the Death Star. Yoda may start by playing games and acting the fool, but he’s dead serious about the stakes here.

Which is why the juxtaposition of his charming, airy theme is so fascinating. Yoda is a teacher. Even in our world, his jumbled insights are used for guidance, advice, and inspiration (“It’s like that one time Yoda said...”). And his theme matches that. Listen to it again (and again). It’s bouncy, hopeful even, but there is somber strain underneath it. Particularly at the beginning. None of what Luke is learning is meant to be easy. There are hard truths served up with danger and darkness. Yet, the music builds and builds until the classic melody cascades into the main motif. The one bit that pops up so many other places in Star Wars. This is the sound and energy of enlightenment that comes after learning hard lessons. Star Wars sends us on a journey along with the characters. So, when the main refrain of the song kicks in, it sounds as though your eyes are now

just as open as Luke's. You've seen the truth. You've got the skills. You're fully enlightened.

That enlightenment also brings great comfort. Again, Yoda is a teacher, a guide and a mentor. There is supposed to be trust and a feeling of safety there. Luke has brought us all to this harsh landscape and soon faces his inner demons and external threats to those he loves. He has to take what he has learned here with him. This knowledge is a safety line. The soothing nature of this theme is highlighted by its reprise in the finale of *Episode V. Empire*, we all know, is famously dark. It's the second chapter, the long dark tea time of the soul, (salute to Douglas Adams), and, as the credits roll, we have no big celebration. Ewoks and Gungans aren't dancing. Statues of the Emperor aren't toppling. Instead, we're left with a lot of hard work to get to the end. This is going to be a challenge. Williams closes the movie with that sense of hope and determination through "Luke's Theme" and "Leia's Theme," but it is when "Yoda's Theme" reemerges that comfort comes. It's a reminder that we are not who we were before this journey began. We have the knowledge and skills to face these obstacles.

This plays out again in *The Last Jedi* when Yoda returns to (literally) knock some sense into his old pupil Luke. In his piece "The Sacred Jedi Texts," Williams plays with a darker version of the "Force Theme" as well as some menacing chaos and a brief dance with "Yoda's Theme." But the entire sequence closes out with one final tough revelation for Luke Skywalker, and Williams once again leans into that comforting lilt of "Yoda's Theme." The times are tough again, mistakes have been made, but Luke, like us, has been enlightened once more. We've learned the lessons, and everything is going to be alright, no matter what happens. With so many of the themes and concepts of Star Wars being about adventure, discovery,

challenges, and pain, you can always return to “Yoda’s Theme” and John Williams reassuring reminder that all of this leads to victory.

32

# **“HIS NAME IS SKYWALKER”**

## **DARTH VADER LEARNS THE TRUTH**

Marvel *Star Wars* issue 6 and

*Star Wars: Darth Vader* issue 6

Writers: Jason Aaron & Kieron Gillen

Artists: John Cassady & Salvador Larroca

Colorists: Laura Martin & Edgar Delgado

It was very important that Darth Vader never learn that he had children. Yoda and Obi-Wan concocted a plan with Bail Organa to keep the twins hidden and safe. The Emperor, Kenobi said, knew that if Vader had any offspring, they would be a threat to him. Even Padmé's death included a ruse to make it look like she was still pregnant at the time of her passing lest anyone get the idea that she and Anakin had children. The reveal that Vader was Luke's father was a historic moment in its own right in terms of pop culture alone and, in story, it led to the final crack in the relationship between Palpatine and Vader. So, yeah, to both sides of the conflict, it was important to keep Vader in the dark. Which means the moment in which he first found out the truth had to carry a special kind of impact.

We finally got to see the moment in a sublime comic book double feature in 2015. Vader, obsessed with discovering the true identity of the Force-sensitive Rebel that fired the fatal shot into the first Death Star, hires that famed bounty hunter Boba Fett to track him down and bring him in. He does but loses a fierce fight with

Luke Skywalker in Ben Kenobi's now abandoned hut. Fett reports back to Vader. He doesn't have the kid but does have a name.

Skywalker.

The twisted machine who was once Darth Vader has just learned—or perhaps confirmed what he had felt—that he did, in fact, have a child. The reveal of Leia obviously comes later in a very crucial moment, but, here, now, on the bridge of a Star Destroyer, Darth Vader learns that he has a son, which means he was lied to by Palpatine, his master. Maybe not in the direct sense. Maybe Sheev Palpatine didn't know a young Skywalker existed, but it did mean he lied when he said Vader had killed Padmé. It means that lie was used to fuel Vader's rage. An anger at the Jedi that never trusted him, that turned on him. An anger at the belief that he had killed his true love before Palpatine could deliver on his promise of using the dark side to keep those he loved alive. An anger that would never be quenched, even as he ruled the galaxy at his master's side, as promised. Palpatine had made a lot of promises and now it was all part of a lie.

That's big for Vader. His worldview had changed. Who was he serving? Why was he serving him? Vader was already taking the fall for the destruction of the Death Star, a weapon he didn't even believe in, and, as we learned in these comics as well, Palpatine had begun secretly training other possible apprentices for almost all of Vader's post-Mustafar existence. Everything to this point has just come into question. This is an important moment.

So important that Marvel made the decision to reveal it in this double feature. First is the subtler version found in the last pages of the sixth issue of the Marvel *Star Wars* main series. Fett reports in, reveals the name, and Vader silently stirs until the very glass of the Star Destroyer in front of him cracks. Fists clenched, the natural

scowl of Vader's face takes on new meaning as the cracks of the glass frame Vader. It's as if the anger is literally flowing out from him. A new kind of rage. That itself was worth the price of admission and induced many a nerd chill, but they weren't done.

The sixth issue of the Darth Vader line, written by Kieron Gillen, replays the same scene. Fett reports in, reveals the name, and Vader silently stirs until the very glass of the Star Destroyer in front of him cracks. Except, now, we get inside the mind of the Dark Lord of the Sith. Memories of Padmé telling him she's pregnant and his reaction to the news. Memories of Palpatine's lie about her death. This leads him to contact the Emperor right there via hologram, but not to confront him. No, Vader tells his own lie. With images of Padmé, Luke's X-wing, and even Luke himself from an encounter earlier in the main comic series racing through his brain, Vader lies to his master. The last frame is a reverse look at what we saw in the main series issue. Vader isn't just staring out of the now broken window. Vader is staring at the Imperial Armada and proclaims the truth. He has a son, and ALL of this will be his. Vader is now working for himself.

This is essential Darth Vader lore. The kind that keeps bringing you back to study and weigh against what you already knew. The ramifications are deep, particularly to *The Empire Strikes Back*. When Palpatine and Vader communicate there via hologram, Vader is moving chess pieces on his personal battleground with the Emperor. And, later, when he reaches his hand to offer Luke a place at his side, he means it. The decision to kill the Emperor wasn't finally realized until the *Return of the Jedi*, but it was first generated here in the pages of these comics.

This is why every avenue of modern Star Wars storytelling is viable and essential. Comics, books, shows, movies. It's all important. There is a vast galaxy of stories to tell, truths to reveal, pasts to

confront, all of it flowing into the overall saga. On these collective pages in one big moment, we didn't just get to experience the moment as Vader fans, we got to understand him. We got to see beyond his mask.

And that's the truth.



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# OBI-WAN AND ANAKIN FIGHT

## FROM OUR DREAMS TO THE BIG SCREEN

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

With all apologies to younger and more recently obsessed Star Wars fans, allow me to take this trip back to 1983. In the novelization of *Return of the Jedi*, author James Kahn was able to squeeze in some tantalizing details about the history of Darth Vader and his old pal Obi-Wan Kenobi, taken, no doubt, from the notes, scripts, and mind of George Lucas. As Luke pressed Kenobi for more information (and, you know, a reason for lying to him), we are told that Obi-Wan confronted Anakin Skywalker about his slide toward the dark side and a fight ensued. “We fought,” said the Force ghost of Kenobi. “Your father fell into the molten pit.” Almost at the same time, an entire generation of Star Wars fans shot up in their beds, the novel dropping to their bedroom floor.

“Everything ok in there?” asked parents everywhere.

Young fans collectively scrambled to pick up the novel as they staved off the intrusion, quoting Han in the process, “Uh... everything’s perfectly all right now. We’re fine. We’re all fine here now, thank you. How are you?”

You continued reading, now thirsty for more clues and answers to the mystery the movies didn’t quite answer. How did Anakin

become Vader? Lava? A fight? What happened?! Later in the novel, as Darth Vader lies dying before his son, Vader regretfully looks back on memories of his wife and of crawling out of molten lava. More revelations, more clues, all of it only adding to your quest to get the entire story. (Also, you learn that Uncle Owen was Obi-Wan's brother, but thhhhhhaaaat didn't exactly hold. George Lucas isn't one for his own canon and I love him for it.) However, that was it. 1983 was the end of the Star Wars story and everything else was whispered rumors, urban legends, or your own personal theories becoming fact in your heart and those of whatever friends you convinced.

All that leads to 2005 and the *Revenge of the Sith*. The official teaser trailer came out and glimpses of a lava covered location and a brutal looking duel between Anakin and Obi-Wan confirmed that we were finally going to see what we had only imagined for years. Anakin versus Obi-Wan. On the shores of a river of molten lava. My 2005-self had just stepped aside to let my 1983-self leap for joy.

At roughly twelve minutes of total screen time, the final fight between Obi-Wan and Anakin is the longest lightsaber duel in the series and contains enough action, energy, and subtext to entertain fans of any age or any generation (especially with Yoda and Palpatine fighting in an empty Republic Senate Chamber at the same time). This was a fight worthy of the hype even if you didn't grow up waiting to finally see the final stanza in the origin of the Dark Lord of the Sith.

In other words, I'm trying to be impartial but many of us waited for TWENTY-TWO years to see this.

After battling all over Mustafar, from inside the facility that saw the end of the Separatist movement to dangerously high above the roaring flow of lava, these two friends worked their way down to

the location of Anakin's fiery end. This is it. This is what we had waited for.

I, for one, leaned forward in my seat.

There are things in this fight I definitely didn't include in the daydream that played over and over in my head for all that time. Some of their leaps onto floating mining devices and droids seem to stretch the plausibility of even the best Force-fueled actions. The in-fight flips occasionally read as too video game-like. Obi-Wan's charmingly awkward proclamation of having the high ground wasn't in the fight I had envisioned, though I can respect the idea that this was an emotional plea from one friend to another. Obi-Wan wasn't just bragging about his battle position, he was trying one last time to stop Anakin from forcing his hand. Yet, when it finally came down to the fateful moment, all of those beats faded away in my mind. When Obi-Wan Kenobi cried in anguish, "You were the Chosen One. It was said that you would destroy the Sith. Not join them." the raw emotions of the scene grabbed me. As Obi-Wan walked away with the guilt and weight of failure that would gnaw at him for the next twenty years, and, as the man formerly known as Anakin Skywalker lay burning on the Mustafar shore consumed by the rage that would entrap him until the end of his days, the only thing I thought was...

...I finally had my answer.

## 30

**THE CHOSEN ONE****THE PROPHECY AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL**

Star Wars

Writer: The Force

Luke Skywalker is the Chosen One, the fulfillment of the Prophecy that foretold the arrival of one Jedi who would bring balance to the Force. By confronting Darth Sidious, the man the galaxy knew as their Emperor, and saving his father who had become Darth Vader, leading to Vader's redemption moment of killing his master Sidious, Luke Skywalker brought balance to the Force. He is the Chosen One.

Except, well, Anakin Skywalker was the Chosen One. He was created by the Force, perhaps with Palpatine's help, perhaps not. His mother Shmi confirmed he had no father. Qui-Gon Jinn was led to him and sensed a vengeance in the Force around him. And I know it's not a popular thing to say, but lil' Ani's Midi-chlorian count was off the charts. He was the one who actually brought balance to the Force. Yes, Luke saved him by throwing down his lightsaber and refusing to strike his father down, but it was, in actuality, the redeemed Anakin Skywalker that stood up, picked up his boss, and threw him off a traditionally perilous Imperial catwalk. The Sith were destroyed and balance restored.

Though, one does have to wonder if the Force was into choosing sides. We know the Sith were bad, but did the Force know that they

were bad? Isn't the Force just an energy field that surrounds us and binds and helps guide our actions? It's not laying down credits in Canto Bight for a Jedi/Sith Pick Em bet. Balance would mean no Sith...and no Jedi?

That doesn't seem right, though. Lor San Tekka told Poe Dameron in *The Force Awakens* that, without the Jedi, there can be no balance. Yeah, they weren't perfect, but the Jedi were pretty nice overall. Obi-Wan tipped very well at cantinas and there was the whole "fighting evil" thing they believed in.

So, yeah, Anakin Skywalker was the Chosen One.

Except...Yoda started openly wondering if that prophecy was misread (Mace Windu agreed, just check out that furrowed-brow nod he gives Yoda when that's suggested). Prophecies are sometimes built to be wrong, misread, or adaptable. If we jump over to the Song of Ice and Fire series, those *Game of Thrones* fans will tell you to be careful about buying into prophecies. George RR Martin would agree. Even if he has an answer to the question of who is Azor Ahai reborn, the author of the series wants there to be a lot of plausible answers along the way to the truth. So, as it is with Star Wars.

Even Obi-Wan Kenobi has changed his opinion. After being initially quite dubious of his friend and mentor Qui-Gon's assertion that Anakin was the Chosen One, he fully bought into the idea later, but then after seeing what had become of Anakin, he changed his opinion again. He believed wholeheartedly that it was Luke. Told a dying Maul as such. Though, as Obi-Wan knows, the very truths we cling to...certain point of view...blah blah blah.

And then there was Yoda. In addition to thinking that the prophecy could have been misread, he was all ready to train the young

Skywalker he thought was the right one to save the galaxy. Leia. He wanted to train Leia **before** Luke. Beyond what he says in *The Empire Strikes Back*, we now know, thanks to Gary D Schmidt's short story "There is another" in the book *From A Certain Point of View*, that Yoda felt very strongly that Leia was the one to be trained. Not necessarily The One, but from his esteemed view, Leia had the better disposition to carry the load of saving the galaxy. It's hard to say he's wrong, though a fresh Force ghost Kenobi thought he was and even showed up to his hut, pulled up a log, and argued with him about it before Yoda relented to training Luke first. So, maybe Leia *could* have been the Chosen One?

Yoda and Obi-Wan both bring good points to the table, but clearly, neither of them had listened to George Lucas. He has strong opinions on who the Chosen One is...and a bit of say on the topic. He says it was Anakin, episodes I through VI are that story, and the proof of that was on display in those wonderfully, trippy dippy *Clones Wars* episodes that took place on the planet Mortis. There, the father, who kept the balance of the Force between his light-side daughter and dark-side son, put Anakin through a test to see if he was the Chosen One. Anakin passed with flying colors.<sup>2</sup>

So, George says it's so. He says The Whills, the beings at the center of the Force, say it's so. The guy working in your favorite comic shop says it's so. I guess it's settled then...

...Anakin Skywalker was the Chosen One, who, in the end, did destroy the Sith and bring balance to the Force. A balance Luke himself says was there in the years following the events of *Return of the Jedi*.

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<sup>2</sup> Yes, I'm completely summarizing everything about those episodes because they're so dense with Chosen One lore you need a fog lamp to find the shore.

A balance that Luke also said...is now gone. The Sith are still gone, for now at least, but the Force awoke and, even if it's not imbalanced, *something* is going on.

So that could mean...Rey is the Chosen One.

Or...it could mean Ben Solo is the Chosen One.

Or they're both the Chosen One.

As C-3PO would say, "Here we go again..."

The best part of the Chosen One prophecy is that it exists, and, like most prophecy in fantasy stories, can be misread. This means we Star Wars fans can have fun (and frustration) going round and round on who we think it is, who we think it was, and who it might be again. Who is the Chosen One? I think it's the one you believe it is.

## 29

# THE BATTLE OF HOTH

## ON THE GROUND LEVEL OF THE FIGHT

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

“Right now, I feel I could take on the whole Empire myself,” said Rebel gunner Dak Ralter as his pilot Luke Skywalker jumps into the cockpit of their snowspeeder. Three years removed from their victory at the Battle of Yavin, the Rebellion has grown, but still hasn’t gained any footing. The Empire has chased them throughout the galaxy and the Galactic Civil War is still feeling pretty one-sided. It often feels like one against the many. And, as the pulpy title *The Empire Strikes Back* suggests, things aren’t about to get better. What is it like to be in this Rebellion? What was it like to face down those overwhelming odds and the stampeding Imperial Armada? What was it like to fight against the Empire? Just watch the Battle of Hoth.

The Battle of Hoth is not a victory for the Rebels, of course. It’s a desperate evacuation as the furious fist of the Empire strikes back and the storytelling comes front and center. This is our point of view to the conflict. Rebel Sergeant Major Trey Callum (a cameo for Bob Anderson, swordsman extraordinaire and stunt double for Darth Vader during the *Episode V* and *Episode VI* lightsaber fights) looks through his electrobinoculars and we are treated to a bone-chilling shot, displaying the theme the battle is built around.



Through the binoculars, we see a large foot of a walker stomp down on the snow and Callum pans up to find the image of a dinosaur-like machine staring back at him. This is the might of Empire and we're on the ground level looking up.

Most of this battle is experienced from the eyes of the overmatched Rebels. It's desperate and raw. We hear the screams as equipment and soldiers are blown off the planet's icy surface. It seems completely futile as we watch laser blasts from P-tower cannons smack harmlessly into the walkers. Luke Skywalker took out the Death Star, but now the armor of the Empire's machines is too strong for the Rebels' blasters. It's overwhelming and chaotic. This is what the fight for freedom in the galaxy feels like. As ships fall from the cold sky and troopers begin to run away, we're dismayed and can't help but think this Rebellion was a lost cause all along. Was there ever really a chance at winning?

Yet our heroes have to learn something about themselves at this moment. Even the largest fights should teach us something about the characters we love. To survive this battle, and the war at large, the Rebels are going to have to do something different. Think outside the box and fight another way. So, they do. They adapt. And every time they chip away at their enemies, it feels hard earned.

When Wedge Antilles and Wes Janson manage to use a tow cable to take down a walker, we're cheering along the Rebels charging toward the fallen walker. When Luke Skywalker escapes death and takes down a walker himself, we're breathing a sigh of relief. This also means we're feeling the losses as well. The death of Luke's gunner Dak is one of the most visceral deaths in Star Wars. Now, with years of fandom under my belt, I can name you all of the Rebel pilots in *A New Hope* and *explain* why their deaths were important, but, for me, nothing eclipsed the dread I first felt when the body of Dak is crushed by the foot of a walker. Again, we're right there for it.

As Luke looks up, that foot is coming down on us. Everything about the Battle of Hoth stays with you.

It also stays with the franchise itself. There are echoes of the Battle of Hoth in so many other parts of Star Wars. The Imperial AT-AT walkers themselves have become their own kind of mythical beast with similar concepts and next or first-generation designs appearing on Geonosis, Scarif, and Crait. We meet Rey living in one. Similar shots pop up elsewhere as both fun homages to the great battle sequence that captivated us then, and a continuation of the story themes now. The First Order uses the Veers Formation on Crait in *The Last Jedi*, an in-story ode to the great Imperial general Maximillian Veers and leader of Blizzard Force on Hoth. The popular 1996 video game *Shadows of the Empire* is remembered by many for being the first chance to actually feel like you were in the battle. Yes, the Battle of Hoth lives on.

Yet every nostalgic image or creative wink and nod is not just a reminder of what we previously saw. It's a direct line back to the feeling of the sequence. What is it like to take on the whole Empire? It's desperate, dangerous and daunting, but when you dig deep and fight back, there is always hope.

## 28

**AHSOKA THE FUGITIVE****THE LESSON OF STANDING ON YOUR OWN**

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Season 5, Episode 20, "The Wrong Jedi"

Writer: Charles Murray

Director: Dave Filoni

We knew something had to happen to Ahsoka Tano. When she was introduced to the Star Wars world in *The Clone Wars* movie and subsequent series, one thing was clear: she wasn't going to be around for *Revenge of the Sith*. Some answer to this potential canon quandary had to be provided and what it was going to be grew in importance with each season of *The Clone Wars*. Ahsoka didn't just become a popular character, she became an essential character to so many fans' love of Star Wars. What happened to her mattered to many. Was she just off to the side of the action in *Episode III*? Was she killed in Order 66? Did she get a job at Dexter's Diner? Well, season five of the series finally brought the answer. She was falsely accused of a terrorist attack on the Jedi Temple and set up by one of her friends, Barriss Offee. This put her in a fight she and her fans never could have imagined: One Padawan against the Jedi Order.

This was a brave choice. There are risks in taking an inspirational character, particularly to young girls, and removing everything she had held most dear. Ahsoka Tano was a Jedi Knight in training, a general in a way, and time after time one of the purest souls in the saga. What's to be gained by ripping it all away from her?

A lot, actually.

Through the investigation of the bombing, the spiraling situation that leads to her being accused of the crime, and the trial that expels her from the Jedi Order, Ahsoka Tano is being forced to question everything she's been taught. Jedi aren't supposed to have feelings and emotions for they lead to dangerous attachments. Jedi are supposed to rise above them, but when does that start to pull you away from what you are really supposed to be? While on the run, she is forced to work with Asajj Ventress, and the unlikely alliance drives home the truth that both of them have been betrayed and abandoned by their mentors and chosen belief systems. Their trust rises from the ashes of broken promises. And finally, the only Jedi left to believe her is Anakin Skywalker, whose own doubts and fears about who he is as a Jedi are bubbling to the surface.

Soon Ahsoka Tano stands before an intimidating tribunal of Jedi that includes Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Mace Windu, Ki-Adi Mundi, and the Jedi that first discovered her, Plo Koon. These are her teachers, mentors, and biggest influences ("I thought I was a part of that order," she says poignantly says later). She's expelled from the Jedi Order and put to Republic trial where, despite a passionate defense by Padmé, Tarkin and Palpatine are about to condemn her to death until Anakin shows up at the right time with evidence to save her.

These are the trials, the questions, and the fallout of the situation. It's one of the best arcs in *The Clone Wars* series for a reason, but, when you strip away those story points, what you have is way more important than just what happens to Ahsoka, it's what we learn.

You see, when the dust settles, those same superstar Jedi now stand before her and offer excuses and apologies AND a place back in the Jedi Order. It's suggested that this is her final Jedi trial and, hey,

she passed! (Haha, we're cool, right?) Not only is Ahsoka going to be welcomed back, but she finally achieves the title of Jedi Knight. She wanted this. As Anakin says, "The Jedi Order was your life."

But she walks away.

Ahsoka Tano turns her back on it all, leaves the Jedi Order, leaves Anakin, and doesn't look back, only forward.

It's not easy. The Order has flaws and cracks at the seams. There are problems there that are already leading to their demise. Complacency, a false sense of security, suppression of individuality, rules and doctrine over compassion and insight. It's all there in front of her. What she wanted might not be what she needs. Yet not everything Ahsoka learned from the Jedi is wrong. There are individuals there she holds most dear, but even they have failed her. Ahsoka's sense of trust is shattered, even in herself. When Anakin pleads for her to stay, calling this a mistake, she doesn't disagree. She only knows she has to figure this out on her own. Define who she really is, away from the Order and the Jedi within it. What a powerful lesson from such an influential character. Dave Filoni, George Lucas, and the entire *Clone Wars*' team took their most important new character and taught her universe of fans the power of standing up strong and discovering yourself. It was one girl against an institution. One girl against her heroes. One girl no one would believe. So, she walked away to learn how to believe in herself. When she returns in later stories, she is something new and reborn. She's not a Jedi Knight. She's Ahsoka Tano and what happened to Ahsoka Tano?

She became herself.

# PADMÉ'S RUMINATIONS

## THE SOUNDS OF HEARTBREAK

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Composer: John Williams

In the fall of 2005, months after *Revenge of the Sith* had come out and closed the Star Wars franchise for the time being, many fans were still working through their emotions about the prequels. I was no different. George Lucas had given us three movies that were unmistakably Star Wars, but still challenged our personal expectations of what we wanted them to be. The original *Star Wars: Battlefront II* video game had just come out and prequel doubts or not, we were all playing it. And that's when I heard the sounds of "Padmé's Ruminations" as I was playing on the game's Mustafar map. Even as I ran around a video game playing as a Clone Trooper with the score blaring through the rattling speakers of my television, John Williams' music and the story George had told during that scene found me again. I wanted to relive the scene and understand the layers found there. See what I had missed. And for the first time in my journey as a fan, the Star Wars movie I wanted to watch that night was an episode of those maligned prequels.

This moment is a testament to George Lucas' ability to be an artistic storyteller, which, we have to be honest, was not always on display in the prequels. The "I truly, deeply, love you" exchange between

Anakin and Padmé in *Attack of the Clones* is one of the highest hurdles to leap over when appreciating the prequels. Despite my current, unabashed love of these first three Star Wars stories, I cannot disagree. There is great subtext to that scene, but, without a doubt, I can't help but imagine that it would have been better received had there not been any dialogue there. A look and a much-anticipated kiss as they were wheeled out to be publicly executed would have been enough for me. Yet, as much as that moment gnaws at the heart of even the most ardent prequel fans, here, in *Revenge of the Sith*, George Lucas leans into that subtle approach with great success. He uses almost no words to make his point while John Williams made the scene belong to the music.

That's an impressive feat even for a movie series eternally associated with its scores. Williams give us music we had never heard before in Star Wars. Slow and ominous, it is as if the song is the very sound of evil closing in. Anakin had been slowly crumbling and breaking apart for a while now. He had been fighting a war for three years, watched his Padawan Ahsoka walk away from the Jedi Order, and seemed to be losing more and more trust from and in his fellow Jedi. (Mace Windu basically tells him, "Wait here while the adults handle this," before going off to arrest Palpatine.) And, by now, his fear of losing Padmé has taken root deep within his soul and Palpatine was playing every note perfectly. For Anakin, it was no longer just about losing his wife and mother of his child, it was also about losing access to the Sith Lord that had just promised a way to keep them all alive. It's all boiling inside of Anakin like a pot of dark side tea.<sup>3</sup>

Beneath that, there is an urgency and heat to the music. Anakin and Padmé are connected at this moment. Not by the Force, but by love.

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<sup>3</sup> Not for nothing, but Hayden Christensen shines in this scene. The trademark brooding and stoic nature works here. Those tears are earned.

They are staring at each other from across Coruscant, two destinies at a crossroads, but there is an intimacy to it that underscores the weight of it all. For Anakin Skywalker, that love is making him question everything that will come after this if he doesn't act right here and now. With Padmé, that love is making her look at everything that has led to this. Though big decisions and moments will soon follow, though death will find one of them, this is **the** moment in which Anakin gives in to his fear of losing Padmé and everything changes.

As the scene begins to close, the incessant hum of synthesizers is met with the mournful wailing of a female vocalist. This is the dialogue of the scene and we are no longer watching Star Wars in a movie theater, we are attending an opera. Padmé's journey to this point had been built upon a great sense of service to the democracy and the survival of the Republic. Though she was reluctant to admit her love of Anakin, once she did that, it only seemed to motivate her more. Her sense of service was more personal now. She never wanted to stop protecting the galaxy, but now she wanted to protect her family and the man she was building that family with was rupturing in two. Padmé is in pain. We know Anakin has been lost, but she's just learning it. Understanding what is happening while trying desperately to fight it. This is sound of her heart breaking and it might have started all the way back at the beginning.

There is a small moment between Padmé and Anakin toward the end of *The Phantom Menace* that I love. With a celebration roaring around them, Boss Nass holding up a peace orb, and the future looking oh so bright, the young queen in her traditional Naboo Jubilation Dress and Anakin with his fresh new Padawan haircut, make eye contact and smile. It's an innocent look full of celebration and relief. The Battle of Naboo had been won and their entire lives were ahead of them, but we know how this story ends. A foreboding



darkness was lurking around the corner even then. Take that moment in *Episode I* and hold it up to this one in *Episode III*. This is where the darkness found them.

In a saga full of big action, bold words, and even louder sounds, George Lucas and John Williams gave us silence and ruminations. Instead of hope, they gave us dread. It was a dark moment of reflection of what had come before and what was about to change the galaxy forever. Padmé and Anakin were being ripped apart and we could actually hear it. And it all uniquely belonged to the prequels.

## 26

**JYN ERSO GETS THE MESSAGE****GALEN ERSO IS ALIVE, AND  
EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED***Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

Jyn Erso grew up thinking her father had left her. That he had abandoned her for the Empire and was maybe even, hopefully, dead. It was just easier that way. He had never been fully present during her life due to his work on the project that would become the Death Star, but he had been there. There was a bond. So Jyn Erso had definitely felt the loss.

It wasn't the truth, mind you. Galen Erso did not abandon her. He was forcibly pulled back into the clutches of the Empire, but Jyn, all of eight at the time, was too young to understand what had really happened when she witnessed the murder of her mother and that the man in white, Director Orson Krennic, gave her father no choice. All she knew was that she was alone.

On the run and being raised by the extremist rebel Saw Gerrera who knew how to teach her to fight but nothing much more, Jyn Erso lived a tough life. Her criminal rap sheet was long. She had fought, killed, and lost many friends. Her pain and point of view were fueled by the resentment she had built up against her father. She avoided the Empire, wanted nothing to do with the Rebels, and

the last thing she wanted to face was the news that her father was alive. However, the Rebellion forced her hand and she was first sent to face the father figure that had abandoned her at sixteen.

And now she was standing before a hologram that was not only the proof that her father was alive and loved her, it was, worse, proof that she still loved him.

Galen Erso was alive and everything about him was not what she built up in her mind. He had been a prisoner, done everything in his power to protect her wherever she had been taken by Saw, and his final act of defiance, the all-important flaw in the Death Star, was designed to pay back his captors. And she now had the responsibility of making it happen. It's a father and daughter reunion like no other in Star Wars and one of the finest acting performances in the franchise.

Felicity Jones takes us on an emotional escapade. This is the moment in which Jyn Erso's worldview is forever altered. It's a complete change of her point of view. Just moments earlier she's telling Saw Gerrera that the flags of the Empire flying across the galaxy don't affect you if you never look up. She arrived at that mindset because everything (and everyone) she had believed in was gone because of the oppressive Empire and the violent Rebels trying to take them down. Her mother was shot dead before her eyes, she believed her father abandoned her for the Empire, Saw left her to keep fighting, and her first love Hadder Ponta died after being caught in the crossfire of a space battle. All of that pain resides in her eyes.

Yet, as she stands before a recorded message from her father, Jyn Erso starts to change. Felicity Jones peels the layers back one emotion at a time. It's the shock and disbelief at seeing her father after all these years. That morphs into the discovery of the truth.

Jyn wasn't abandoned by him, she was protected by him. And beyond that, this is the realization that she had been wrong about everything that sent her down her path, except the powerful truth: her father had always loved her. The tears streaming down her face now, formed years ago, and the walls she built up to survive no longer needed to be there. She feels every bit of the weight this message brings. Jyn Erso was now part of everything she had been running from.

It's a testament to those scenes in which Star Wars gives you so much packed into one moment, but all it wants is for you to connect to one quiet truth. Amongst the impending doom of the Death Star, the Empire, and the very walls coming down around her, Jyn Erso learns that the one truth is hope. First, it was about her running from it for her survival, but now it was about running toward it for the survival of everyone.

## 25

**GODSPEED, HOLDO****A LEADER GOES DOWN WITH THE SHIP***Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

The theater audience held their collective breath as we all realized what Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo was about to do. Taking control of the Resistance starship *Raddus*, she began to make a jump to lightspeed through the First Order fleet. With grace, dignity, and a sly smile, she pulled off her final act. Sound and score vanished. Vibrant colors went dark. The *Raddus* exploded into the mighty *Supremacy* and beyond into the other ships. From a distance, we watched the explosion and for a beautiful, bold beat, the only thing we could hear was our thoughts. As the debris scattered through the stars, a lone audience member in a far corner quietly said, “Whoa.”

No one else said a thing.

We had never seen anything quite like this in Star Wars before. There are absolutely familiar elements. The delayed sounds of explosions reminiscent of Jango’s seismic charges in *Attack of the Clones*. The exploding Star Destroyers had strains of the destruction of the Super Star Destroyer *Executor* to them. And it all harkened back to Han Solo’s warning regarding the perils of jumping to lightspeed way back in *A New Hope*. But this was different. This was

beautiful and violent. Inspiring and haunting. It was a tragic lesson in the responsibilities of leadership.

There is no shortage of opinions about Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo, of course. As is most fandoms want these days, the thoughts about the character and what she did are often polarizing, combative even. But, lost between the huffing and puffing of the fans (and I myself do enjoy a good huff and puff-filled opinion every now and then) and buried behind the spectacle of her sacrifice resides the real truth. And it's somewhere in the middle of it all.

The character of Holdo was an interesting addition. Not bluntly and blatantly militaristic, you got the sense that her position of leadership was born out of her longstanding connection with Leia as well as her accomplishments. (She did something big at the Battle of Chyron Belt!) Their history stretched back to their teenage years, back before Leia rebelled and the fall of the Empire. There was trust there. Loyalty. She seemed to be a leader full of heart and a calming spirit reminiscent of Mon Mothma, but she was fully comfortable in taking charge. She was a great leader to some. And they wouldn't be wrong.

Unless, of course, you're Poe Dameron. Holdo, like Leia, believed the hotshot pilot was a loose cannon. Forged by the fires of war, but not yet refined. So, in a controversial decision, she kept her big plan of escape away from him and most of the crew, save for those closely associated with her. This didn't sit well with Dameron and, well, just go find a grumpy corner of the Internet, it didn't sit well with a lot of people. She was a bad leader to some. And they wouldn't be wrong.

In life, as in fictionalized space wars, leadership is often about making the tough calls in even tougher moments, and believing in them. She made a choice to hold back key information from someone she didn't feel could handle it. It was her right to do so.

It's any leader's right. And look what happened. Upon finding this out, Poe Dameron shares the information with Finn and Rose and starts an ill-fated mutiny. This zaps the Resistance of precious time and allows the information to slip into the ears of Benicio Del Toro's DJ, who's always looking to sell his soul to the highest bidder. The wheels fall off. If only it had managed to remain a secret until the last possible moment.

But it didn't, and that's the messy reality of the situation. If she had told Poe early on, despite what were probably correct misgivings about doing so, perhaps none of this would have happened. Yet, like any leader, Holdo doesn't have the luxury of going back. She can only deal with the now. She can only go forward. And that leads straight into her sacrifice.

As it all starts to unravel, as time slips away and the First Order uses DJ's tip to figure it all out, Holdo realizes this desperate escape all falls back on her. There are many things to feel here, and the scene gives you all the silence and time to experience them. There is loss. For her, for Leia, for everyone trying to get to the surface of Crait but doesn't. There is destruction. The Resistance resources, like the early days of the Rebellion, are thin and every soldier and ship is needed. And there is peace. The last look we see on Holdo's face is a small smile. Her end has come, but she takes solace in the fact that from this something else can live on.

As I sat in that theater, stunned at what I had just watched, dazzled by it all, I didn't immediately know what the right answer about Holdo was. Quite frankly, I didn't care. I watch Star Wars with my heart on my sleeve. I connect to emotions first, then analyze later. And what I feel is that Amilyn Holdo was a good leader who made a bad decision. And she knew it. This final act is her penance. It was her taking responsibility for what had happened. As the sound and color return to the screen, we have to catch our breath and

move on. Not unlike the Resistance. What remains is a gorgeous, breathtaking, and painful lesson of the high price of leadership and the honor of sacrifice. Any way you look at it, the Vice Admiral had to go down with the ship.



## 24

**KENOBI VERSUS MAUL****GROWTH, CHANGE, AND  
THE DEFINITION OF POWER**

*Star Wars Rebels*, Season 3, Episode 20, “Twin Suns”

Writers: Dave Filoni & Henry Gilroy

Director: Dave Filoni

We were all geared up for a fight. A good, old-fashioned, light versus dark, lightsaber fight. Episode twenty of the third season of *Star Wars Rebels* was building up to the final duel between Maul and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Thirty years in the making, following Maul’s first “death” at the hands of Kenobi on Naboo, this feud was going to be settled. Under the stars of Tatooine and by a humble campfire, these two adversaries faced off. Kenobi stood at the ready, in the fighting stance of his former master Qui-Gon Jinn, not to attack or even defend himself, but to protect Luke Skywalker. Maul seethed and ignited his double-bladed saber. In seconds, it was over. Maul tried to use the same tactics that killed Qui-Gon, and Kenobi countered. In three quick hacks of a lightsaber, it was done.

That was it?

That was all?

This was the fight?

Yes. That was it because this final duel was never going to be just a fight. This wasn't the leaping, flipping, slashing sequel to the iconic duel on Naboo. This wasn't meant to be a simple lightsaber duel easily squeezed into your best of lists. It was more than that. This was about dueling ideologies. Vengeance versus forgiveness. A lesson in growth and the importance of change. And, above all, it was about the definition of power.

It's ok to question things in Star Wars. That is sometimes lost on fans, especially in this modern age of discussion-based media where content begs you to have an immediate opinion and proper place for everything you've just watched or read. Though this is pretty straightforward entertainment, it has absolutely affected all of us on many levels. That doesn't mean you're going to love everything presented to you and it doesn't mean everything is going to be fully understood upon first viewing. *Star Wars* is popcorn storytelling, but it was created by a true artist who wanted to make a modern myth and those creating it now follow the same desire to add to that myth. And myths teach, challenge, and counsel. Give yourself the space to grow and to look at things a second time.

It would have served Maul a little better if he had done the same.

Maul has spent his entire life burning with rage. His existence can be tracked on a straight line. Now, to be certain, Maul had no choice in how his path began. He was given over to Palpatine as a child and raised to be a weapon for the Sith Lord. Inside Maul was a suffering that could never be healed, though he definitely tried. Everything he did was defined by his ability to conquer, rule, menace, and destroy. That fruitless pursuit of revenge lurked in the shadows of everything he did, and all of his revenge-filled rage was focused squarely on Kenobi (though Palpatine certainly stopped getting Life Day cards from Maul). Maul pulled himself back up from death, rebuilt himself, and fought violently to get back to where he felt it

all went wrong. Every path he stomped down in his life has led him to this one final grasp for power: Kill Kenobi and win this lifelong fight. He's shocked, though, at what he finds.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had everything a decent, code-abiding Jedi could want at one point. He was trained by one of the best Jedi, pulled deep into the inner circle of the Order, and sporting an impressive resume of victories, successful missions, and friends all around the galaxy. (I'm pretty sure Dexter Jettster named a space sandwich after him.) Obi-Wan Kenobi was a poster boy for the light side, but along the way fortunes turned, loved ones died, and everything he believed in or everyone he trusted had to be challenged, not unlike Maul. Kenobi's view of the galaxy had to change. Unlike Maul, he knew he had to change to find true healing. A new purpose was in front of him and it took Kenobi far from the glorious heights he had been residing in and away from any personal desires. Maul arrived to find what he describes as a "rat in the desert."

Nearly thirty years have passed since they first met. Then, Maul was a seething ball of evil, confidently devouring his prey, and Kenobi was an anxious, eager Padawan ready to leap at his mentor's killer. Now, beneath the Tatooine moonlight, Maul has arrived as the exact same, seething creature to find a calm, patient Jedi at peace with what he must do and knowing that he rose above all the temptations, trials, and losses that brought him here. Kenobi has changed and accepted his new purpose in life. Maul cannot understand it.

This is not a fight with lightsabers. This is a fight with words and Maul strikes first, japing that he shouldn't even worry about killing Kenobi and should just leave him amongst this squalor, alone, adrift, and powerless. Kenobi strikes back, telling Maul, "If you define yourself by the power to take life, the desire to dominate, to possess...then you have nothing." A fatal blow of truth before one

weapon has even been drawn. Seconds later, Maul is dying in his rival's arms. Thirty years and no change or growth. Thirty years and no hint of forgiveness. Thirty years in pursuit of the wrong kind of power. It cost Maul everything.

We were all indeed geared up for a fight, Maul–Kenobi 2, the final chapter in a heated rivalry, but this moment asked you to look at the story in another way. The final image is Kenobi holding a dying Maul. It is not a moment of victory, it's a moving moment of compassion. A perfect end to the tale of this feud. Kenobi provides peace to the being that spent a lifetime trying to destroy him. It was compassion over vengeance. It was growth versus the same path. It was the power to kill falling before the power to heal.

That was the real fight all along.

## 23

**THIS IS ADMIRAL RADDUS****THE REBEL ALLIANCE ARRIVES***Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*

Writers: Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy

Director: Gareth Edwards

Fist. Pumping. Moments.

These are what Star Wars fans live for. The music soaring. The action heavy. The stakes high. And the heroes seem to be down and out. But, then, boom, the tide turns. In one moment, it all changes and our collective fists pump in celebration. This is the fun and promise of every new Star Wars adventure. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* delivered not only one of the best fist-pumping moments, but also one of the most inspirational when Admiral Raddus and the Rebel Alliance arrive to save the day during the Battle of Scarif.

The Rebel Alliance had been building to this moment. Slowly, over the course of nearly two decades, the stirring opposition became the fiery Rebellion. Separate cells started coming together, still unsure of *how* to fight together as much as they were sure of *wanting* to fight together. Ships, equipment, and resources were gathered and shared. Leadership started to emerge. Then Mon Mothma gave her speech. The Rebel Alliance was formed, but it had yet to make its move.

Sympathetic politicians still very much in office were still afraid and overly cautious as they clung to the faint hope that diplomacy could still work. Some just straight denied the existence of the Death Star despite hearing from witnesses to the destruction of Jedha. Military leaders were no different. They couldn't decide on the best way to fight and most feared that it was a war they could no longer win. But Admiral Raddus had heard enough. Designed in part to look like Winston Churchill and, according to the performer that voiced him, Stephen Stanton, sound like George C. Scott's General Patton, the gruff Mon Calamari leader declared, "I say we fight," when no one else was ready to take that final leap.

Jyn Erso, Cassian Andor, and their brave band of volunteers that comprised the unsanctioned Rogue One squad went off on their own mission and Raddus leaped into action. It's no small moment that, upon learning of this, Mon Mothma smiles. Admiral Raddus was providing a spark—helping her to light the fuse she had needed to catch fire for years.

All of this leads to the grand fist-pumping moment when all hope appears to be lost on the surface of Scarif, but the cavalry arrives. Chills go down your spine as the fleet drops out of hyperspace. They are all there. X-wings, Y-wings, U-wings, blockade runners, Hammerhead Corvettes, Nebulon-B frigates, even the *Ghost* from *Star Wars Rebels*, and at the center of it all is the Mon Calamari battlecruiser, the *Profundity*. It's a ragtag collection of ships, but all of the pieces are on the board. As a classic Star Wars music cue trumpets their arrival, Admiral Raddus barks out, "This is Admiral Raddus of the Rebel Alliance. All squadron leaders, report in." Simple. Direct. Keeping within the protocol. He is here, the fight goes on, but it is much more.

This was a statement.

After years of hiding in the shadows, fighting when they could, and hoping for a new dawn, the Rebel Alliance was here. These were the heroes we cheered on in the original trilogy. These were the ships and weapons we daydreamed seeing in action. This was what the opening crawl of *A New Hope* meant when we first read “Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire.” As you pumped your fist and cheered these Rebels on, you, like the Empire, were realizing that this was no longer a movement. This was a war.

## 22

**"WE'LL HANDLE THIS"****DARTH MAUL ARRIVES TO FIGHT***Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Let's stop you right now because you're right. The lightsaber duel between Darth Maul and Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi is everything it's cracked up to be and, from start to finish, is a reason to love *Star Wars* on its own. It inspired new fans and captivated old ones in 1999 and has only grown in stature as subsequent generations of fans discover it. There is much to love. John William's "Duel of the Fates" score that ran underneath it was its own sensation before the movie even arrived in theaters. It was a smash single complete with a video in rotation on MTV. The horns, the chorus, and the strings reached out and grabbed you. Fans were humming it before the movie even came out. Darth Maul, that vengeance-filled blunt weapon of Palpatine, brought us his double-sided lightsaber and a growling visage designed to haunt us all. As foretold in the infamous *Episode I* soundtrack spoiler debacle, Qui-Gon Jinn would tragically lose his life <sup>4</sup> and Obi-Wan Kenobi would avenge him. It was truly a duel for the ages, featuring warriors at the

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<sup>4</sup> The soundtrack to *The Phantom Menace* was released on May 4, 1999, two weeks before the film. Rabid fans raced out to once booming stores to purchase the soundtrack on CD only to discover one of John Williams' tracks was titled "Qui-Gon's Noble End." Even if that didn't convince you that Qui-Gon's fate was sealed, the next track was titled "The High Council and Qui-Gon's Funeral." Yep, good chance Qui-Gon wasn't making it out of this movie alive.



top of their game. But it all begins with one hell of an entrance and an unforgettable preamble that spoke directly to fans of all ages.

When talking about the reasons we love Star Wars, we can look at full sequences and entire scenes but sometimes one image, one line, or one beat transcends the complete moment it is part of. For all of the action centering around Darth Maul, and the combat skills of Ray Park, it is the image Maul's arrival to the fight that has stayed with fans. The Battle of Naboo had begun and Padmé, Panaka, and the volunteer forces of Naboo are on the move from the main hangar on Theed, when the double-doors open up to reveal Darth Maul. Black robe, red and black face, burning evil eyes, and that look that freezes them all. No one makes a move. No blasters fire. Maul slowly looks up at his stunned enemies. That is the true image of Maul and his true introduction.

We had already been introduced to him by this point, yes. We'd even seen him in action. But this is the moment that the character of Darth Maul steps into the spotlight and demands we never forget him. "Duel of the Fates" starts playing and it almost appears as if Maul is hearing that music in his own mind. He's been waiting for this moment. Given over to Palpatine as a boy, he has been forged into this conduit of hate. He is a weapon finally unsheathed.

On the other side stand two Jedi. The heroes of the galaxy. Though they had a prior run-in with Maul on Tatooine, he was just a striking shadow then. They suspected his origins, but, now, as he stands before them, they know. For the first time in a thousand years, the Jedi would knowingly face off with the Sith. How do they respond to this momentous occasion? With a calm, cool, collected declaration from Qui-Gon, "We'll handle this."

The fight hasn't even begun, but the table is set and the story in place. The diametrically opposed beliefs are present. The stakes

have been raised. And we're about to have a big showdown. This, my friends, is Star Wars.

This grand entrance and glorious beginning to this duel of the fates almost comes off as deliciously meta and self-referencing. As if the movie was paying homage to an entire generation of fans and the ones to come by telling us that we are about to witness the type of lightsaber fight we've been having with our friends, our toys, and even by ourselves for years. You know when you grabbed your Darth Vader action figure and dreamed up the biggest fight you could imagine? Well, here you go, that fight was about to become a reality.

The Naboo forces leave. Queen Amidala's underrated comedic response ("We'll take the long way") sends them off and we're ready for the lightsabers to come out. Maul, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan literally get ready to fight, playing to the moment and the music. The robes come off and you can almost hear the ring bell toll. Round one is here. The fight is on. So, yes, we could celebrate the entire fight from this point on. It was the Star Wars version of a Wrestlemania main event. However, go to the moment when the combatants enter the ring, and everything sets the tone for the most electrifying fight we had never seen—yet always wanted.

## 21

**RUN, LUKE, RUN****THE IMPACT OF BEN KENOBI'S SACRIFICE**

*Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Obi-Wan Kenobi was supposed to die.

We know this because mentors, which that old wizard Ben Kenobi is the poster child for, are supposed to die. This is part of the hero's journey and by now, thanks to a steady diet of pop culture fantasy, we all have become self-proclaimed experts on that mythical roadmap for storytelling that is the lifeblood of adventures everywhere. George Lucas was learning at the feet of the twentieth century master of the subject, Joseph Campbell, and unabashedly built *A New Hope* around that frame. (And, yes, Kurosawa movies.) It's part of the reason why it worked so intensely and struck so many chords in people. It was a tried and true method of storytelling and Obi-Wan Kenobi's death was part of that.

However, when the story of Star Wars is rolling out in front of you for the first time, this death isn't just some checkmark on the fantasy storytelling guidebook. This is a loss that affects you even as time (and repeat viewings) lessen the blow. It's time to forget the analytic look at the myth structure and the loss of Luke's mentor and guide. How does it affect us? Even as a fan, don't worry, for now, about the importance of his sacrifice being the very reason

our heroes escape the Death Star. Don't dig into this representing Kenobi's belief in Luke Skywalker as the Chosen One and his nearly twenty-year mission to protect him coming to an end. Look at it as you first experienced it. This is about learning the concept of death. This is Star Wars giving you a hug and saying this is tough, this is real, but, like Luke, you have to keep running.

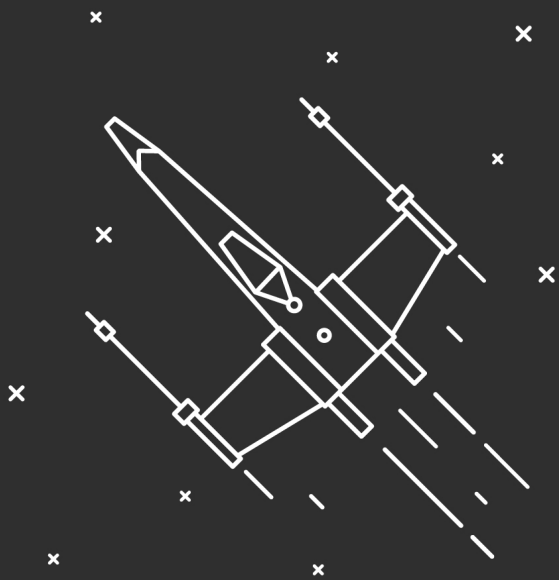
There are classic deaths in pop culture that impact different generations. Bambi's mom. Simba's father. Optimus Prime in the animated Transformer movie (I'm still dealing with that one, to be honest). But for many, the self-sacrifice of Ben Kenobi was the first time we felt a loss on this level. If Star Wars, particularly *A New Hope*, is itself a guidebook through the coming perils of adulthood, then loss, death, is definitely part of that lesson plan. When Kenobi faces his former apprentice and ignites his blue lightsaber to stand against him, the young fan perk ups. There is excitement about Kenobi saving everyone and Han, Luke, and Leia getting out of this jam. (And, yes, Chewie and the droids. Always on the outside looking in.) So, when Vader strikes Kenobi down and he vanishes into the spirit world, the gasp you hear from that young fan is not them recognizing the well-placed use of the mentor death, it's them, again like Luke, screaming, "Nnnnnnooooo!"

A lot of this can be attributed to Sir Alec Guinness. He brought so much to the character in a short amount of time. Like the impact he had off camera with the cast and crew, he brought the steadying hand to the story. Yes, that's the mentor role in a nutshell, but Guinness knew how to play it whether he fully grasped Star Wars or not (He was always a bit prickly about Star Wars and the phenomenon it created). There is an immediate warmth to him on screen and the trust builds from the outset. His first line of dialogue is a friendly "Hello there" to R2-D2, but he's saying it to us. We've just watched Luke get jumped by Tusken Raiders and we're lost in

a strange world. And here's a Space Grandpa simply saying, "Hello there." Kenobi represents safety and security. He is the embodiment of protection (and still quick with a saber as we soon learn in the cantina). The character of Obi-Wan Kenobi was a powerful warrior and insightful teacher. His list of accomplishments and feats go on and on. His adherence to the Jedi way, even in the face of love, is to be studied, but here, now, in the fresh adventure of *A New Hope* that begins to rocket us around the galaxy, Ben Kenobi is home and you should feel his loss.

We all have to leave home, figurative ones as well. We all will have to face death and loss. We all have to have to learn how to move on from it. It's the circle of life and all those truths. And all the mentors in our lives will have to be the ones to send us on. This is why the sacrifice of Ben Kenobi is the one Star Wars death that transcends generations and buried beneath the analytical threads and wonderful pontifications about the character and his role, you can never erase the sadness you first felt.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had to die, and we all had to grow from it.



## INTERLUDE #4

### “LAUGH IT UP, FUZZBALL...”

I take Star Wars very seriously.

At this point in our journey together, that's pretty evident, and I know I'm not alone. Star Wars is something many of us take to heart. It's designed to entertain on the surface, but strike chords deep within you. The farther you crawl into the world, the more you break down every moment, scene, and frame, the stronger the passion becomes. This is very serious business. That doesn't mean, though, that there isn't a place at the table for poking some fun at the franchise, teasing it, laughing at it, and laughing with it. That's a fun part of being a Star Wars fan and actually fosters a stronger, shared connection to it. We're all in on the joke...

Back in high school, which for me was around the time Timothy Zahn was bringing Grand Admiral Thrawn, Mara Jade, and hot chocolate to the expanded Star Wars universe, I met one of my best friends to this day. A tall, lanky Canadian kid named Joel. Forced together by destiny to sit next to each other in Mr. Harris' math class, we soon found that we shared a love of wonderfully silly things like professional wrestling, Robotech, baseball cards, and, of course, Star Wars. Like most fans, particularly, let's face it, young immature boys, we danced around each other first, peacocking with our knowledge of Star Wars facts as the preening feathers of our egos. Then we both stumbled onto our love of *Hardware Wars*.

That was the moment we became best friends.

Parodies and jokes about Star Wars began almost as soon as *A New Hope* flickered onto the screens of the world on May 25, 1977. *Hardware Wars* was the first to step into the spotlight. Written and directed by Ernie Fosselius and co-produced by (and starring) eventual award-winning music producer Scott Matthews, the thirteen-minute film was both a silly parody and heartfelt love letter to the space movie that was sweeping over the world. Forget my knowledge of obscure Imperial officers or Joel's ability to quote Luke Skywalker at a moment's notice, the fact that we both could talk about the adventures of Fluke Starbucker, Ham Salad, and Princess Anne-Droid and quote Red-Eye Knight Augie "Ben" Doggie without missing a beat brought us closer together as fans and friends. (This is also why the First Order laundry room scene in *The Last Jedi* will always have a special place in my heart. The spaceship-like shot of the iron is proof that Rian Johnson can quote Ham Salad like us and George Lucas, who called *Hardware Wars* his favorite Star Wars parody in a 1999 interview on the UK *The Big Breakfast*.)

Following *Hardware Wars*, an entire legion of great parodies emerged to poke fun at Star Wars, including Kevin Rubio's viral sensation *Troops*, a play-it-straight parody of Star Wars and the TV show *Cops*, insightful digs and silly laughs from the crews at *Robot Chicken* and *Family Guy*, and, of course, perhaps the most legendary one of all, Mel Brook's *Space Balls*. To some growing up, saying "Use the Schwartz" is just as meaningful as "Use the Force."

In each of these and all the parodies, sketches, and jokes produced, written, and made, one thing shines through: this is all coming from a point of love. Star Wars is emotionally stirring and uses deep themes to pull us in, so we can find the great meanings behind the characters, action, and stories we love.

Star Wars is also silly.



Chewbacca is a walking, fighting, growling seven-foot version of George Lucas' real-life dog. The *Millennium Falcon* is almost eaten by a gargantuan space slug called an Exogorth. Yak Face is...a yak. Even the name Luke Skywalker is silly. And all that is just in the hallowed ground of the original trilogy. But it's all part of this wonderful tapestry of a franchise that continues to have a profound effect on all those that let it into their heart. To love Star Wars is to also laugh at Star Wars. So, laugh it up, Fuzzball.

May the Schwartz be with you...

## 20

**THE IMPERIAL MARCH****VENGEANCE GETS A THEME**

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Composer: John Williams

The Empire was upset.

Really, really, really upset.

Having lost their Death Star, a valuable leader, and countless resources, human and otherwise, the Galactic Empire wasn't exactly going to sit back and let those pesky Rebels hand out medals and call it a day. They were going to strike back, and it wasn't like that strategy was a secret—it was on the movie posters for all of us to see. The Empire had vengeance on the mind and John Williams had cooked up perhaps his most iconic theme for the occasion. Say hello to “The Imperial March” or as it's known to you, me, and the galaxy—“Darth Vader's Theme.”

The introduction to the piece of music is one of the best reveals for anything in the series. Characters, locations, ships. Doesn't matter. This is up there with all of them. In 1977, film audiences were awestruck by the size of an Imperial Star Destroyer flying over the screen in hot pursuit of Princess Leia's ship. It's left an indelible mark, but, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, a collection of those ships previously thought to be gargantuan were now being covered in the shadow of something larger. As the opening strains of “The Imperial March” play, we see, for the first time, Vader's new Super

Star Destroyer command ship, the *Executor*. It dwarves the other ships. The ones we once thought so big. To match the moment, John Williams has given us the very sound of the oppressive Empire marching all over the galaxy.

It's a bit weird to think that this theme wasn't present in *A New Hope*. There is an identifiable Imperial motif and Vader gets quite the bellicose music cue when he struts onto the hallway of Leia's ship, but Williams focused his themes on other areas and characters. Which makes sense from the point of view that *Episode IV* was about hope, heroes, and the light side winning. Vader has less than ten minutes of screen time in *A New Hope*. Though he is definitely positioned as the main baddie, there was just as much as a reason for Tarkin to have his own theme as there was for Vader. (Ok, that's a slight joke, but now I want to hear "Tarkin's Theme." What is the sound of silently grimacing?) For *Episode V*, Williams was inspired by the might of the Imperial Armada even more than just Vader himself. It is "The Imperial March" to be clear. But like a lot of things in Star Wars, this theme took on a life of its own.

You can't—and shouldn't—separate this theme from Darth Vader or even Anakin Skywalker. It is synonymous with the Dark Lord's evil intentions and, time and time again, is used as foreshadowing for what is to come in the troubled life of Anakin. None more powerful than when the end credits of *The Phantom Menace* reprises all of the first prequel's adventurous themes before boiling down "Anakin's Theme" to a slow, ominous thread of "The Imperial March." It's the monster lurking down the end of the path.

Yet, the influence beyond its original intentions doesn't stop there. It's such a powerful (and catchy) theme that, in keeping with time-honored traditions, Star Wars fans have brought this theme into the real world with them. It's played at sporting events, heard during parades, appropriated by radio shows, and unless this is just me,

used by ourselves. Who hasn't hummed this song to themselves while walking into a business meeting, approaching a gym, or just when you happen to find yourself walking down a long hallway? That...that...can't just be me, right? You get out of your car, turn the corner, and just start humming that intimidating triplet no matter who can hear you. In fact, let them hear us. This isn't just Vader's theme—it's our theme! It's about determination, purpose, and, ok, yeah, some good old-fashioned aggression. (I guess that accounts for hearing it at hockey games.) "The Imperial March" can be taken with you into any real-life situation that requires unbending strength.

You can't do that with the "Ewoks' Theme."

I know. I've tried. The Ewoks are strong creatures, but their tremendously catchy theme sounds like a picnic. A literal sonic picnic. Vader's theme is the sound of war, the sound of marching, the sound of a shadow spreading over the world, and it's the unmistakable sound of vengeance. Perhaps the bigger question to ask is why Star Wars fans connect to something so...evil. That's a conversation about redemption for another time. For now, we can all just keep humming along to our favorite villain's theme.

19

# THE DEATH OF KANAN JARRUS

## THE POWER OF STORY

*Star Wars Rebels*, Season 4, Episode 10, “Jedi Night”

Writers: Dave Filoni & Henry Gilroy

Director: Saul Ruiz

Kanan Jarrus had been dead for days—tragically sacrificing himself to save his friends and true love as an exploding fuel depot engulfed him—and the heads of Star Wars fans everywhere were still down, their hearts still heavy. There was never a feeling that Kanan Jarrus would survive the events of the animated television show *Star Wars Rebels* and the idea of sacrificing yourself in Star Wars is a time-honored tradition. When the series started in 2014 you would be hard pressed to find a fan that didn’t at least acknowledge that there was chance Kanan was going to die before the show ended. So, there wasn’t a feeling a shock going around the fandom, there was just a gaping, grieving hole where our feelings had been. Kanan Jarrus was dead and no one could stop thinking about this big moment on our small screens.

Everything to this point in the *Star Wars Rebels* story has been expertly weaved together, so all the right heartstrings are pulled here. Hera and Kanan, having finally kissed earlier, now share a beautiful kiss with a heartfelt proclamation of love from Hera. Ezra and Sabine arrive in a stolen Imperial ship to finish this mission of

rescuing Hera, so they can all get back to fighting for freedom. It's a rebellious family reunion broken up by dastardly Imperial Arihnda Pryce ordering the destruction of her own fuel depot. As the fuel pods explode, Kanan uses the Force to stop the explosion from killing Hera, Ezra, and Sabine. With a Force push, he sends them to safety while succumbing to the explosion. All the elements to create maximum emotional oomph are there. Check, check, check, and check. So how come none of us were ready for this?

It's possible that the shock of our response had to do with some level of bias against animated content. Despite watching all of *The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels*'s previous seasons, growing up with movies like *The Lion King* and *Toy Story* affecting lives, and crying at the opening sequence of *Up*, it's as if we still keep turning on the television and expecting to see a simple cartoon like it was a Tuesday afternoon in 1985. That's somewhat understandable for Star Wars fans because this is generally considered a movie franchise. Silly, but understandable. We're trained for these moments to happen on the big screen, but how we consume content has been forever changed. Star Wars stories will always play out in big ways and reward the theater-going experience, but it will now also play out on small screens, computers, and watches. (Yes, I sound like I'm two steps away from screaming get off my lawn.) Star Wars—this mythical space opera—will always have the power to transcend formats. And perhaps that lesson was the shocking part?

For one brief moment, we underestimated the storytelling of Star Wars.

Yes, we all suspected Kanan Jarrus was going to die. Theories were formed, discussions had, and expectations created. We pulled out the Star Wars canon roadmap and had fun getting caught up in where this *has* to fall in the storyline. Kanan needed to die—or at least be removed—before the events of *A New Hope* or even *Rogue*

*One.* You have to account for Luke being the only hope, and last Jedi, so they can't interact. The same thing starts to factor into Ezra and Ahsoka's story and, before you know it, this all starts to sound like complicated directions for making a piece of Swedish chain store furniture as opposed to a breathtakingly simple story of good versus evil.

Don't feel bad, I've made an entire career out of creating those mental roadmaps. It's fun, and certainly part of being a fan, but Star Wars doesn't stop there.

The death of Kanan Jarrus is a sum that exceeds its parts. This is more than the sacrifice of a Jedi for the good of the many. This is more than the bittersweet ending to a love affair that never fully bloomed because of the fight against evil. As you hear the music swell as Kanan holds back the flames, as you push in on the pained horror on Hera's face, take in the stunned confusion as Ezra watches his mentor die, and realize that clarity has returned to Kanan, not just through returned vision, but through seeing his true self and purpose, you are confronted head-on with the power of story.

We far too often get locked in on what *needs* to happen. Does Kanan need to die because Yoda said Leia was the last hope after Luke? Maybe. If you want to tie yourself down to every little bit of detail. *Star War Rebels*, a show placed directly in the middle of all those wonderful details, never once holds itself to them. The show goes to where the characters take it. It goes where the story needs it to go, not a visual encyclopedia of Star Wars information. So, while we were all getting caught up in what we expected based on timelines, bullet points and the medium in which we consumed this moment, the death of Kanan Jarrus emerged as a testament to the grandeur of the Star Wars story.

It's still ok to cry, though.

# **"INTO THE GARBAGE CHUTE, FLYBOY"**

## **PRINCESS LEIA DEFINES HERSELF FOR A GENERATION**

*Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

I need to apologize to Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan. Though I would only tremble in her presence, shuffling nervously foot to foot while hoping to find the words—any words—to say to her, I owe her a giant, soul cleansing apology. As you know by now, Han Solo is my favorite Star Wars character. The answer I *have* to give when someone asks me that near impossible question, but I grew up adoring and revering Leia. Princess Leia artwork adorns my walls. I've pushed past children in toy aisles to make sure I was the first to get a new Leia action figure. I don't have any children, despite what I tell other adults when I push past their kids toward those toys, but there is a good chance I would name my daughter Princess Leia. Not just Leia, but Princess Leia. So, there has never been a shortage of appreciation for the character in my Star Wars fandom. Yet, if I'm being honest, I do owe Leia that apology. I didn't truly understand the importance of Leia, the self-rescuing princess.



One can almost be forgiven for thinking Leia was just a damsel in distress during the first half of *A New Hope*. The title of princess in this modern-day fairy tale set in space sends you down the classic princess culture path. She's being chased and is soon captured. R2-D2 keeps replaying her desperate call for help and, over and over and over, we hear, "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." She *does* need rescuing, so, of course, our new heroes are going to go to save her. That's what heroes do, this is the hero's journey, and I, for one, am very glad Luke and Han set off to save the princess. It's just funny that all of those elements that flow into a timeless and classic trope, seem to easily cover the fact that one of the first things Leia does is shoot a stormtrooper with her defender sporting blaster pistol and has no problem talking back to the two main villains that everyone outside of the soon-to-be-Force-choked Admiral Motti cower from. Governor Tarkin? Darth Vader? No problem, Leia's got words for you and she's not going away quietly. Yet, I didn't fully appreciate the importance of who she was and how she was doing it.

This is not to say that I didn't appreciate—in truth, love—the moment in which Han, Luke, and Chewie burst into detention block AA-23 with designs on rescuing the princess held captive in cell 2187. It's dripping with the adventure serial action Lucas wanted this story to be. Han is ever the dashing rogue, even as their plan falls apart, and Luke is charmingly naive as he frees Leia, despite being a little short for a stormtrooper. Blaster bolts soon fly as sparks explode, and Leia blasts open a grate because it's their only way out. And with an all-time classic line of "into the garbage chute, flyboy," Leia rescues her own rescuers and defines her character forever. I saw it, I got it, I loved it, but it was the value of that definition that I missed.

There were many others who didn't, though.

All the young girls who watched Star Wars with the same wonder and amazement as I did focused on every word Leia said and every action she took—they didn't miss it. They understood what Leia meant. They loved Han and Luke, too. They secretly rooted for Darth Vader as well. However, unlike toy catalogs of the '70s and '80s suggested, Star Wars isn't about boys' toys and girls' toys. It's all there for everyone, but it was different when it came to Leia in *A New Hope*. She stood alone. As a young boy, I could find myself in Luke or Han. Learn from Obi-Wan or fear Vader. I could daydream about fighting with Biggs, Wedge, and even that belly runner expert Porkins. The young girls of my time had Aunt Beru...a glimpse of the Tonnika Sisters...that lady that jumps when stormtroopers come marching toward docking bay 94? So, as all hell broke loose in the hallway of that detention level, Princess Leia wasn't just saving herself and defining her character. She was sending a message to those that needed to see it.

One such fan was my friend and *ForceCenter* co-host Jennifer Landa, and I feel her words carry more weight than mine. When asked about it, Jennifer had this to say.

*I owe Leia Organa a lot. One of my earliest movie memories is watching Return of the Jedi in the theater. Immediately, Leia made an impression and she set the bar high for what I expected from movies, and particularly in female characters. Size mattered not when she singlehandedly killed the vile gangster, Jabba the Hutt. I was in awe of her bravery when she jumped on a speeder bike and chased down stormtroopers through the trees. I was touched by her kindness and compassion toward Wicket, which eventually led to the Ewoks joining the Rebels' cause. And when it was revealed that the Force was strong with her, I spent hours daydreaming about Leia wielding a lightsaber and becoming a Jedi,*

*like her father before her. Leia was the epic adventure hero I needed and wanted to see.*

*Growing up in the '80s, we had countless iconic movies that changed a generation—Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Goonies, Stand By Me, The Karate Kid, Ghostbusters. While I enjoyed all of these films, as a young girl, I found myself frustrated by the lack of lead female characters onscreen. And so, once Return of the Jedi was released on VHS, I watched it every afternoon after school. It gave me hope that underdogs could triumph against all odds. And it reminded me that women could lead rebellions, in spite of what the world was telling me.*

*As I got older, and life got messier, Carrie Fisher herself became just as important to me as Princess Leia. Through her writing, one-woman shows, and unpredictable talk show appearances, Carrie taught me the importance of embracing mistakes, approaching everything honestly, and always speaking one's mind, especially when it's inconvenient and inappropriate.*

*So, thank you, Leia, and thank you, Carrie Fisher. You showed me that princesses can rescue themselves, generals can be compassionate, but the best person I can be is to unabashedly and unapologetically be me.*

So, there you have it. I saw Leia as a great character, a respected leader, and a valued member of the team. All things she is, but those young girls like Jennifer saw something more. They saw her stand up to Darth Vader because no one else was going to do it for her. They saw her at the front of the Rebellion because no one else was a better fit. And with her back against the wall, they saw Leia rescue herself because that's what you have to do. I saw a princess, they saw themselves. And fortunately, every generation of fans continues doing just that.

So, I'm sorry, **Princess** General Leia Organa of Alderaan. It took me a while to finally appreciate the entire scope of your importance and understand your entire impact. Not that you needed it.

17

## "NOT FROM A JEDI"

### PALPATINE ENSNARES ANAKIN

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Did you ever hear of the tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise?

When Chancellor Palpatine uttered those enticing words to Anakin Skywalker in *Revenge of the Sith*, no one had heard of Darth Plagueis or his tragedy. New Star Wars lore was being unveiled right before our eyes and it turned out to be one of the most discussed and celebrated scenes of the Star Wars prequels. The appeal was twofold. This was the moment in which Palpatine's long game of seducing Anakin to the dark side finally took hold and it was delivered with such juicy, diabolic aplomb that all you could do was sit back and enjoy Ian McDiarmid's full Shakespearean lean into being the gothic villain. Anakin was hanging on his every word and we couldn't get enough.

That Anakin would fall prey to the Emperor was no real surprise, even if you didn't already know what happened. Attachment was his weakness. First, it was about leaving his mother and then it was about not being able to save her. Falling in love with Padmé only made Palpatine's job that much easier. The Jedi Order had put up the one wall Anakin never really wanted to climb over, dispassionately leaving his connections behind. Palpatine needed

only to provide him with the one thing that would pull him down off the wall entirely: a way to save the ones he loved.

Palpatine had been waiting for this moment for a long time and that is one of the tasty morsels in this scene. As he tells the tale of the great Sith Lord Darth Plagueis, we understand what he's implying. It's subtle at first, but clearer as you chew on the scene itself. He has been watching Anakin for a lot longer than we knew, perhaps even back to when he was an apprentice to Plagueis as it certainly seems like he's boasting that Anakin's miraculous birth might have come from the dark machinations of his master or, even more juicy, from himself after he learned the skills from Plagueis. This has been building and building and now Palpatine is delivering a pitch-perfect monologue made for the stage. In fact, that this scene is underscored by them attending a Mon Calamari ballet called *Squid Lake* at the Galaxies Opera House is not just a fun trivia note, (but that does often get you points in a trivia contest) it's the full embrace of the theatricality of this moment. This is high theater and Palpatine knows it.

One almost has to pause and relish the idea that, in his free time, Palpatine had been practicing this monologue like an overzealous theater kid. Planning each little taunting laugh and feigned scoff. Mulling over what details to give and what to hold back. Asking Mas Amedda or Sly Moore if it would be more effective if he turned his head slowly while telling Anakin Plagueis could create life?

"Is that too obvious? I think it might be too much, but it just seems like the right thing to do."

Regardless of how he got to this point, Sheev Palpatine delivers the goods. Anakin is absolutely ensnared in his trap. This the peak of his journey, it's downhill from here. Anakin Skywalker has been in turmoil his entire life, that we know, but he always found a way

back to shore. He was a Jedi, after all, and didn't just believe in the good ideals at the core of the Order, he practiced them. He was good hearted and that tracks all the way back to his youth. So, every impulsive move, burst of anger, and growing doubt about the way of the Jedi or the direction of the Republic always faded to the background. What remained was Anakin Skywalker, Jedi Knight. But his nature is to help others. From volunteering to podrace in an effort to help get Qui-Gon Jinn off Tatooine, following Padmé and her desire to help Obi-Wan on Geonosis, and being the only one to believe and fight for the falsely accused Ahsoka Tano, Anakin wants to help others. And that's where Palpatine always knew he could get him. He lays it out simply. You can learn the power to keep the ones you love from dying. How do you learn this?

Not from a Jedi.

Message received. Anakin now needs to learn this power from Palpatine, which means he also has to keep Palpatine alive. It's the final attachment Anakin cannot break away from. It's here, at this moment, that he takes the bait. Palpatine has his new apprentice right then and there. The eventual turn is just a formality. What a victory for Palpatine and what great moment for Ian McDiarmid.

That is the second part of this moment's appeal. A real-world reason to love it. McDiarmid doesn't chew up the scenery here, he is the scenery (not unlike later when he proclaims, "I am the Senate."). McDiarmid was a respected Scottish theater actor with little screen time when he first donned the Emperor's robe for *Return of the Jedi*. He only was in his late thirties but masterfully embodied the decrepit evil overlord. *The Phantom Menace* brought him back to the role if you don't count the 1997's special edition footage added to *The Empire Strikes Back* and McDiarmid again expertly portrayed him. But it all leads to this scene. Everything before is beautiful subtleness and shadowy intrigue and everything after is bombastic

and charmingly over the top. It's here, though, that McDiarmid plays every aspect of the Emperor, a secret Sith Lord who killed his master and is about to rule the galaxy. It's a one-man show. He's not just getting to Anakin and dangling the power he seeks, he's telling his own origin and gleefully reliving the act of murdering his master. McDiarmid plays with each memory. Every line is one step forward on Palpatine's long journey toward being unstoppable and he feels it. As the ominous music plays and the exotic imagery of an alien ballet dances in the background, McDiarmid's Emperor tells us the story of passion, attachment, power, and murder.

And, now, we don't just know the tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise. We'll never forget it.



## 16

**A NEW HERO****REY AND THE HERO BLADE**

*Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams & Lawrence Kasadan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

They all were ready for the moment.

An entire legion of Star Wars fans had looked to this young girl, a scavenger from Jakku, and seen the new hero she was to become. Not just locked into one specific marketing demographic, these fans wasted no time embracing Rey as *The Force Awakens* promotional train left the station. It was young girls and boys excited for the new saga. It was older fans that grew up idolizing Leia as she stood alone as the only woman in the main cast, or had watched Padmé's role seemingly slip away into the background. Even composer John Williams had said in interviews and during concert performances that the character of Rey and the charming, engaging life Daisy Ridley brought to her are part of the reason he returned to the Star Wars galaxy. He just didn't want anyone else writing music for Daisy and Rey.

While walking around the floor of Star Wars Celebration in 2015, months before *The Force Awakens* even came out, you could sense the groundswell of support for Rey organically growing. Every person in homemade and crafted Rey cosplay was a signpost of excitement, admiration, and anticipation for what was coming

down the path. Rey from nowhere was already living in their hearts. They were all ready for a new hero to be crowned.

From her first sequences and early moments, Rey rewarded the faith already given to her and won over even the coldest and most dubious of hearts. But the specter of other legends still hung over her story until the snow began to fall on a planet turned superweapon and Rey stood up to a monster. The moment itself plays out after Finn bravely takes up the lightsaber and stands against Kylo Ren first (something Finn gets far too little credit for). Yet, Finn soon finds himself in trouble and the hero blade that reemerged into the Star Wars story and became a focal point for the light and dark side rested in the snow. An image we had seen before. The blade moves as Kylo Ren calls it to himself, but he soon realizes he is not the only one reaching out to this legendary lightsaber. With a rush of energy, it flies past him and into the waiting hand of Rey. The hero blade is now with a new hero.

This doesn't just launch the rivalry and the tangled saga of Rey and Kylo, it serves as a moment of great self-discovery for Rey. From Jakku to now, Rey has begun to uncover many new things about herself. Things she does not yet understand. So, it is with great purpose that Rey recalls the lightsaber, but still finds herself apprehensive, unsure of herself, maybe even a little afraid (don't tell Yoda). As Kylo Ren stands shocked and definitely afraid, Rey feels every ounce of this moment's weight, all of her insight and waking powers, all of her raw street fighting skills. Everything she has learned before this moment cannot prepare her for what comes next, but she has to face it. This is what has come to her and where her courage must take her. She alone has the lightsaber. The hero's blade is in her hand. Rey is our new hero.

Yet, go back to that moment when the lightsaber, half buried in the snow, starts to move. Just before it goes zipping into Rey's hand.

That was the moment that many fans—I will confess to being in that group—tensed up with our own excitement and anticipation for what we thought might be coming next. One name was on our minds.

Luke Skywalker.

Yes, the legend himself, in hiding during this story, could have sensed a disturbance in the Force and returned right there. The blade jumping into his hands as he began to settle a score with Kylo Ren. It would have been quite a moment. As the lightsaber flew across the screen, that was what I believed was coming. However, as the Emperor said, “Young fool, only now, at the end, do you understand.” As Rey, a character that I had absolutely loved up and through this point, ignited the lightsaber, I realized that I wasn’t ready for this. I wasn’t ready for Rey.

Who cares that Luke Skywalker had thrown down his blade in *Return of the Jedi*? I wanted him here now. Who cares that Han Solo had already told us that Luke had felt responsible for Kylo and all that went wrong and simply left it all behind? I wanted him to just walk back in. I wanted Luke Skywalker there...but he didn’t come. This wasn’t that moment. His path as a hero wasn’t going the same way as before. Whether I was ready for this or not didn’t matter because, like Rey holding a lightsaber she was not fully ready to wield, this moment was here. I had to face it.

As Rey hacked, slashed, and fought against an injured and desperate Kylo Ren, a new hero emerged and the image of all those fans at conventions played out in my mind. The young children dressed as Rey. The adults carrying her staff. The enthusiasm in all of their voices. Up until this moment, I had not been ready for our new hero Rey. Yet fortunately, she did not need me to be, everyone else had already been waiting.

15

# **“WHAT DOES YOUR HEART TELL YOU?”**

## **SHMI SKYWALKER AND THE MOTHERS OF STAR WARS**

*Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Star Wars is full of great moments of strength. Tough choices and tougher actions abound. There's Luke Skywalker throwing down his blade and refusing to kill his father. Princess Leia strangling the bulbous neck of her captor Jabba the Hutt. Chewbacca *not* eating that plump, tasty porg that he had roasted to perfection. So many times, the heroes of Star Wars prove their mettle and show their fortitude. Yet one of the greatest displays of strength in this saga is often overlooked. Shmi Skywalker watched her son walk away forever, bravely believing that it was meant to happen. That it had to happen. It's time to turn the spotlight onto Shmi Skywalker and the mothers of Star Wars.

It is understandable to watch *The Phantom Menace* and find your focus on Anakin Skywalker. This is the first chapter of his tragic tale after all. Qui-Gon, young Obi-Wan, Padmé and the dazzling saber skills of Darth Maul are part of the parade of characters that surround his story and demand your attention. Beyond that, you

still might be working through your feelings on Jar Jar Binks, Boss Nass, and the “roger, roger” of it all. There’s a lot to take in, the good, bad, and pee yousa. But buried beneath all that is the strongest example, and, sadly, one of the only examples, of the power of motherhood in Star Wars.

It’s hard to imagine what it would actually take to allow this to happen. To let your child walk away. Yet it has to happen. Shmi knows this. Believes this. She was never clear on what this moment would look like, but her belief that her son was meant for something grander than the life she was able to give him was always there. While a miracle birth will give any mom a good jump start on that belief (and maybe more than a few questions), she maintained it through season after harsh season on Tatooine as a slave. Yet, the true challenge is here as her son walks away, changing the course of the Star Wars saga and, eventually, helping to save the galaxy.

That’s right. This is important. Shmi Skywalker raised Anakin as best she could. When Luke Skywalker says years later that “there is still good in him,” he’s talking about the heart of Anakin Skywalker inside that twisted machine. He’s talking about what is at his core. All the pain, anguish, and anger that exploded out of Darth Vader began bubbling up after he left his mother, but the good in him—the good that leads to his final redemption—was put there by Shmi Skywalker. After decades of torment, he returns to that table on Tatooine where he echoes his mother’s belief in helping others. It’s a long, painful journey, but, in the end, Anakin Skywalker kills the Emperor, destroys the Sith, and helps bring about balance and peace. All that begins when Shmi, played with subtle perfection by Pernilla August, swallows her pain, tosses aside her doubt and exhibits the strength to let this boy begin that journey.

Mothers in Star Wars don’t often get their due. As it is in a lot of fantasy tales, the death of the mother is often used to spurn our

main character arcs along. Luke and Leia never know Padmé (despite Leia's false memories, I suppose). Jyn Erso has to watch her mother be murdered right in front of her. Iden Versio loses her Imperial propaganda artist mother to illness. Norra Wexley and Shara Bey, mothers to Resistance pilots Snap Wexley and Poe Dameron, have to either leave their children to fight in the Rebellion or die far too early on in their lives. Mothers aren't around long enough in Star Wars, but their influence runs deep.

Star Wars fans talk of great heroes and the wars that they fight. We focus on the lightsabers, the blasters, and the ships they fly. We watch empires tumble and balance restored. This is a myth, a legend, and a tale we love of great strengths and accomplishments, but never overlook a mother with the will to believe in something beyond her control. Shmi Skywalker's quiet strength and unwavering belief in the purpose of this moment changed a galaxy.

14

## AHSOKA FACES VADER

### THE LESSON OF LIGHTSABER FIGHTS

*Star Wars Rebels*, Season 2, episode 22, “Twilight of the Apprentice”

Writers: Dave Filoni, Simon Kinberg, & Steven Melching

Director: Dave Filoni

Who doesn't love a good lightsaber duel? Clashing blades, good versus evil, Sith versus Jedi, and the fate of the galaxy at stake. There's a reason lightsaber battles are near the top of every fan's reasons to love Star Wars. We connect with the intimacy of the battle. There are no ships or blasters here. These fights are personal. Primal, even. One of the most anticipated lightsaber duels became one of the best when the second season of *Star Wars Rebels* closed with the showdown that had been years in the making. Ahsoka Tano finally squared off against her former master Darth Vader. At the outset, it was about revenge and power, but like so many moments before, this lightsaber duel was about something much more important.

Ahsoka enters this fight with revenge in mind, which is refreshing in its own right. Revenge is often unexplored in Star Wars. At least, from this side. The Sith wanted revenge so much that they get their own movie title about it, but it always seems surface level. “We hate the Jedi and want revenge!” Got it, you're upset and wear dark robes. But for Ahsoka to seek revenge from the vantage point of someone so steeped in the light side of the dance, is interesting. Will it affect

her? Take over her? Lead her to the dark side? Of course, revenge is something she can seek because she's no longer a Jedi. Gone are those restrictions. She's fighting for Anakin. This monster before her isn't just something Anakin became, it's something that seemingly defeated him. So, if Vader destroyed Anakin, what she's after seems right.

Vader, though, is fighting for power. He conceals that behind his mask of hate and anger, but he wants power. He's here for the Sith Holocron that Ezra Bridger and an injured Kanan Jarrus are trying to leave with. Vader wants it for the power it can bring his Emperor, his Empire, and himself. He needs to have power over his past. If the side effect of that is being able to kill Ahsoka, one of the more potent memories from his personal history, even better.

It's enough drama and stakes to build from, but at the peak of this fight, with a Sith Temple trembling around them, Darth Vader suffers a blow to the head at the hands of Ahsoka. Everything this fight is about before vanishes in an instant. Ahsoka has a chance to leave. She can follow Ezra and Kanan to safety and leave Vader to his fate. But, then, she hears her name called out in a voice that is no longer the mechanical rumble that terrorizes the galaxy. It's Anakin. It's her mentor and friend. She turns to see the eye of Anakin Skywalker now staring out of the broken mask of Darth Vader. All of the revenge leaves her heart. What is exposed is not just the face of who Vader once was. The anger and hate have been cracked away and Ahsoka is seeing the fear of a trapped soul. Anakin hasn't been defeated. Anakin is in a prison.

Revenge and power have given way to compassion and it changes them both.

Ahsoka sees the suffering on that face, so she decides to stay. No longer to fight, but to stay with Anakin even if the cost is her



own life. She's not going to leave him as she had previously done during her departure from the Jedi Order. Her decision to stay at this moment speaks to her love and compassion for the man he once was. That's stronger than fulfilled revenge. Vader senses this. It scares him. He has been at war with himself since, perhaps, the first moment he left Tatooine. Now, Vader is looking into the face of someone who still believes in Anakin's redemption. The past and future of this conflicted man hang over the moment.

Right here, right now, Ahsoka might be the only one who can save him. Obi-Wan failed. Padmé died. Yet Ahsoka can do it. She can forgive him and try to pull him out of this prison. And that, to the part of him that is still Vader, is more powerful of a weapon than any lightsaber she could wield. Vader senses defeat and won't allow it. Not this time. Not now. He will not give up his power. With a flash of anger, the Dark Lord returns and Ahsoka knows she has lost. The fight goes on. Darth Vader goes on. Yet, the next time he is shown this much compassion, he accepts it and finds redemption, sacrificing himself like Ahsoka was prepared to do here.

The most impactful moment in this fight contains not one crossing of the blades. We do love a good lightsaber fight. They are a key ingredient to Star Wars, but not for the furious action. It's the lessons they teach us and the truths they reveal. When Darth Vader clashed with Ahsoka Tano, we didn't just see a brilliant display of fighting forms and skills, we didn't just see the light side collide with dark, we learned about the strength of compassion, the false comfort of revenge, and the dark addiction of power and what it all does to both sides of the fight.

## 13

**THE JEDI STEPS****A SCAVENGER FINDS HER PLACE***Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*

Writers: J.J. Abrams &amp; Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt

Director: J.J. Abrams

There has yet to be an ending of a Star Wars movie like the one in *The Force Awakens*. We've seen the brave downbeat end to *The Empire Strikes Back*, the jubilation of *Return of the Jedi*, *A New Hope*, and the peace orb happiness of *The Phantom Menace*, and the look toward new hope in *Revenge of the Sith* and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Yet, never before have we had this wondrous combination of music, intrigue, purpose, and a look to what comes next. The Jedi Steps are the culmination of Rey's first steps and the beginning of Luke's final chapter. There is so much to it, but it all begins with a girl living alone on Jakku. You can't help but imagine what Rey was thinking as she climbed those ancient steps on Ahch-To. To see it all from her perspective....

You're on a forgotten planet in the Unknown Regions and landing on an island you've already seen in dreams. Only a short time ago you were on the surface of a planet turned superweapon defending your new friend—your only friend in ages—against a maniacal monster that had just killed his own father. With a hallowed blade now in your hands, you fought with your instincts, but it was not enough. As you pushed back against your enemy, fighting to stay alive, he offered you another path, but for the first time, you realized

the power of the Force and willingly called to it. A timeless energy was now on your side and controlling your actions. And the steps keep going.

It hasn't been long since you were held captive and tortured by this enemy as he invaded your very mind to take what he felt was his. Yet, in the process, as your fears were used against you, a strength you didn't know you had emerged. You turned it against him and uncovered his fears. Soon, you escaped, only to watch one of the only beings you've ever trusted die. His spaceship is now fading into the background as you climb higher.

Your mind is still trying to make sense of the visions you received. A lightsaber, breathing, an encroaching evil, but the sense that there is more for you to come. It shocked you and shook you. The sense of it has yet to be revealed and you're not even sure if you want that. Maz Kanata told you a truth you're not ready to face. Everything you need is in front of you, there is nothing for you in your past. But as you climb, you're not sure you want to face what's ahead.

Your home seems so far away, but you were just there, feeling safe despite the struggles, and kept afloat by the routines. Though you'd don an old X-wing helmet and dream of adventures well beyond your sand-locked life, you never believed those adventures would happen. You never wanted them to, frankly. It was easier to mark each day on the walls of that repurposed walker, each scratched-out day another brick in the wall you built around yourself. Your dreams had promised you more, but your fears kept you firmly nowhere. And, now, you have climbed these steps and crested over a hill. You are not prepared for what awaits.

You were once a lowly scavenger far from the center of this universe. Your fears say that you have no place in the grand stories of the galaxy. You've heard the legends of the days of old. They reached

your ears even out in the far Western Reaches. The greatest legend of them all was the fabled Jedi Luke Skywalker. He was a myth, a story, a tale from long ago. But now, here you are, standing before him, sent by the Force itself to pull him back into the fight. He's real. It's all real, including your newfound place in it all. The hope of many now rests in your hands. Your journey has just begun, and you can't comprehend the turns it will take, the challenges it will create, and, from here, you have no idea that the most important lessons ahead of you will be learned on your own. But, at this moment, now, with the ancient steps behind you like the life you once clung to, you are at the center of the story. All hope is with you. As the weight of the moment circles around you and the doubts and the fears still threaten to engulf you, as the Jedi before you sees you like a challenge, not a calling, you hold out your hand, not knowing what comes next. There's only one thing you know: you've climbed up from nowhere and the top of these steps is where you belong.

## 12

**THE MILLENNIUM FALCON****MEET THE GALAXY'S FAVORITE RIDE***Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Without a doubt, the *Millennium Falcon*, that venerable YT-1300f Corellian light freighter, is a Star Wars character in and of itself. That's not some controversial take or great insight, it's just a heartwarming truth. From the moment we first hear about it in *A New Hope*, all the way up until Kylo Ren loses his mind over the mere presence of it in *The Last Jedi* and beyond, the *Millennium Falcon* is more than a ship. Yet, how *did* the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy jump off the screen and into our hearts? The answers lie at the very beginning in a dingy Mos Eisley cantina and a dusty docking bay.

The introduction of Han Solo is a master class on how to set the tone for a character. Even if George Lucas himself later wrestled with the morality of Han shooting first, (Sssh. Sssh. We don't need to discuss that here.) the introduction of Han Solo is cinematic perfection. Another reason that when discussing the proper running order of watching the movies for the first time, the answer is always *A New Hope*. However, that's Han, we're here for the *Falcon* and built into that wonderful introduction is Han Solo tying much of his identity to this ship with such blustery pomposity.

“Han Solo. I’m Captain of the *Millennium Falcon*.”

It’s the Star Wars equivalent of meeting someone at a local bar and having them blurt out, “I’m Kevin. I drive a Porsche.”

Oh. I see, Kevin. That’s great.

Naturally, the first thing Obi-Wan Kenobi would do is challenge this ship, wondering if it’s fast, and that sends Han into a tailspin of incredulous posturing. Though Han is describing (or exaggerating) *his* accomplishments, the myth of the *Falcon* is created here. *IT* made the Kessel Run and *SHE’S* fast enough for you. Right then and there, we’re expecting the grandest ship in the galaxy. Instead, we get an RV primed for a Mel Brooks Parody. (Oh, yeah, that’s what Lone Starr flew in *Spaceballs*.) We see this through the eyes of Luke Skywalker, who, like us, is not impressed, but soon stormtroopers are upon them and the ship blasts them safely off-world. At that moment the ship becomes something more—the *Millennium Falcon* is an underdog.

The *Falcon* consistently exceeds any expectations and doubts cast upon it, so we’re prone to root for it. It doesn’t look like much, but we soon see that it has it where it counts. It gets beat up, shot at, and stolen, but it always comes through and keeps on surviving. The *Millennium Falcon* is a symbol of rebellion—to both sides of the fight. The Empire and now First Order sees it as a contemptuous pest that won’t go away, and the resisting Rebels see it as home.

And the idea of home is the final piece to the puzzle. The reason we love this ship so much. Home is important in Star Wars because the saga is so big, vast, and perpetually in motion. Yet, no matter what happens or who is on the adventure, if they—we—step onto the *Millennium Falcon*, we get a sense that everything is going to be alright. It’s an intergalactic safety net. And all of that flows off-

screen, pours out from the pages of comics and passes through the myriad toys and collectibles to our own lives...

...if you've ever come home from a long trip and sighed in relief at the sight of your own place. If you've ever taken some emotional damage but pressed on without your figurative radar dish. If you've ever got into an old, beat-up, yet reliable car you still need in your life, turned the key to an ignition that wouldn't easily turn over, and muttered, "Hear me, baby? Hold together." Then, you know that the *Millennium Falcon* is more than a ship, even more than just a character, that YT-1300f Corellian light freighter running on a touch of hyper-fuel, is the embodiment of all things good in Star Wars: hope, inspiration, and always having a place where you belong.

## 11

**"I KNOW"****THE LOVE AFFAIR OF HAN AND LEIA**

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

What would have happened if Han Solo had delivered the response to Leia's "I love you" as written and planned during the making of *The Empire Strikes Back*? Would Han have been viewed any different over the years, less cool and detached? Would this moment have less impact, just a good story beat amongst many others in the film? Would hand towels and matching T-shirts have been made if Lawrence Kasdan's original lines made it onto the screen? (Leia: "I love you. I couldn't tell you before, but it's true." Han: "Just remember that, because I'll be back.") Fortunately, we'll never really know. Leia said, "I love you," and Han said, "I know." Harrison Ford's insightful change to the scene had made it to the screen, creating a behind-the-scenes urban legend and giving us the very heart of the saga's most popular love affair.

The story of "I know" is the one of the first behind-the-scenes tidbits you learn as a young Star Wars fan, no matter when you discover the series. Harrison Ford improvised the line. Right then and there. It's a tale told time and time again in the aisles of comic shops, out on the playground, and amongst like-minded friends. Almost none of it is true, though, even the stories told by some of the people that made the movie. The 2004 Lucasfilm approved



documentary *Empire of Dreams*, itself a must watch, has both Harrison Ford and director Irvin Kershner telling different tales of the moment. Harrison says “George” had written the original dialogue and that he felt there was a missed opportunity with the established character of Han Solo. Kershner seems to back up the improvisation theory by saying he just told Harrison to say the first thing that comes to mind, leading to the gut reaction of “I know.” Neither of those versions is one hundred percent true, almost as if Obi-Wan Kenobi himself was telling them from a certain point of view, but it only added to the myth. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend...or make a documentary about it.

The truth is a little more convoluted and laced with tremendously more on-set drama. Ford **did** feel as though this was a missed opportunity and sat with Kershner to suggest the scene go as it would eventually be seen. Journalist Alan Arnold had been on set, compiling behind-the-scenes stories for a book and had audio cassette recordings of not only the historic suggestion from Ford but the fallout. Carrie Fisher had not been present for the conversation and was understandably angry with Kershner later on and upon learning it from Ford first and not her director; she gives Kershner a tongue-lashing fit for a rebel princess (after doing the same thing to Ford). Screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan never seemed to like the change, bemoaning in a 1981 interview with *Star Log Magazine* that he felt “their romance had a touch of falseness to it.” Kershner also seems split on whether or not he immediately took to the suggestion, depending on the interview clip you’re consuming. Same goes for George Lucas with a 2010 *Vanity Fair* interview with Kershner apparently revealing that Lucas wanted two screenings of the movie with the original version of the scene shown in one and the Ford-changed scene in the other. Legend has it the original version screening never happened due to the audience response to the “I know” version. Some forty years later, if you put that all

together as Gwynne Watkins did in a 2015 article for Yahoo!, you have a closer version of the truth.

Or you can just hold onto the idea of Harrison Ford doing a crazy make 'em up like Han Solo himself.

Your choice.

Regardless of the fascinating truth, what remains is perhaps what should have always been there: the core moment of Han and Leia's love affair. When you think of Han Solo and Princess Leia, this is the moment that comes to mind. Which is not to suggest that other scenes before and others that came later, including their last embrace in *The Force Awakens*, don't stack up to this. This scene, this very moment, however, is their entire relationship in one timeless snapshot.

Leia has been too busy leading a rebellion to allow herself the time and freedom to verbalize her love for Han. In many ways, she just couldn't afford to. Leia is always going to put the needs of the big picture—the galaxy, the Rebellion, government—above herself. She was even supposed to be Luke's first Jedi student but turned away from that path, so she could better serve the New Republic as a leader. As she watches Han be sent down a path with an unknown, and most likely fatal, fate, she finally allows herself the freedom to admit her love to Han and, more importantly, herself. And Han knows it.

Han's response, though, should never be interpreted solely as flippant and unaffected. With the romantic life of these characters now played out over multiple films and stories, we can look back to this moment as Han's unwavering belief in their love and his understanding of Leia's sense of duty and her greater purpose. He already knew she loved him and was willing to wait for her to

finally come to terms with it. This isn't whip-smart banter and a kiss on the *Millennium Falcon*. This is forever, even with death looming, and Han isn't being cocky. (I mean, maybe a little bit, this is Han after all.) Han just knows it.

The love story of Han and Leia isn't the most perfect relationship in the saga. It's not without hardships and realistic stumbles. And its ending is tragic, but the story of these two characters on screen is not unlike the behind-the-scenes story of how this moment came to be. In many ways, it wasn't supposed to happen. Nothing ended up as it was written. It took on a life of its own and, piece by piece, things fell into place and the love story of Han and Leia did not go as it was planned, but as it should be. And that, in the end, is the only thing we need to know.

10

# PEACE AND PURPOSE

## THE DEATH OF LUKE SKYWALKER

*Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

Luke Skywalker died today.

I thought I was ready for it. From the moment it was announced that new Star Wars movies and stories were on the way, I had begun to prepare myself for the proverbial passing of the torch. These adventures were going to be focused on the next generations. New names to lead us into new times. This didn't mean that those classic characters wouldn't have their time in the many suns of the galaxy, but I had laid down the framework for accepting the harsh reality of losing those heroes I looked up to for years and years. It made sense to me that Luke Skywalker was going to be the Obi-Wan or Yoda of this sequel trilogy and, well, we know where that led us.

So, I really thought I was ready.

For one thing, character deaths in Star Wars aren't necessarily shocking. In an era of fandom that is now used to, and often craves, surprise deaths and big plot twists, Star Wars keeps itself grounded in the classic myth structure. Each big death serves an important purpose in keeping with the higher calling of the story. It's a lesson on the road to enlightenment and inspiration. It's a mentor passing away or a heroic sacrifice. It's the villain getting their comeuppance

or finding redemption. It's not just as simple as "you see the deaths coming," it's more about you need them to happen.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had to die. Yoda had to die. Qui-Gon Jinn had to die. The lesson isn't that old Jedi gotta go, it's that the mentor role has great value and we all have to grow past them. Death is the most powerful, visceral way to make that happen. At least with the Force around, we still get to see and hear our favorite mentors. (No one IS truly gone, I suppose.) So, again, if Luke Skywalker was the Obi-Wan of this series, then it would stand to reason that he had to die. In truth, this is all easier said than done because we don't simply watch these films, we experience them. We love these characters. We're not watching with a checklist of story points and names to cross off, but we do understand the big, broad beats and needs of the story.

Case in point, I was ready for Han Solo's death. When it happened, I didn't cry, there were no tears, I just appreciated what it was and what it meant. Han Solo died doing what he always did better than smuggling: he turned back toward danger to help his friends and finally, in the end, committed to something bigger, Leia's wish to have him bring home their son. He died for it. It was tragic and bittersweet, but Han Solo died a good guy. Not as a scoundrel on the run. So, with all that in mind, I went into *The Last Jedi* confident that I was ready for what would most likely come next. The death of Luke Skywalker.

Nope.

I wasn't ready for that.

It wasn't just that I wanted Luke Skywalker to live either. More than anything, I have to be clear to myself about that. Would I have liked it if he lived? Yes. Yes, I would have. And same with Han, Admiral

Ackbar, Kanan Jarrus, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, Dax Ralter, Zev Senesca, Jyn Erso, Cassian Andor, Sy Snootles, Max Rebo (but not Droopy McCool), and Nanta the Ewok. All of them. Each and every one of them could still be alive in the Star Wars saga and I would be overjoyed. I'd be standing side by side with the "Rogue Two" Zev Senesca Fan Club, cheering and celebrating. And I can certainly understand any other fan's desire to see Luke Skywalker survive. He was *the* hero for a generation and his influence was felt far beyond the walls of the story. There is something truly comforting knowing that Luke Skywalker is just around the corner. But that's not always how it goes in the Star Wars story. There are always losses on the path to victory. That's part of the myth being told. So, it wasn't that I only wanted Luke Skywalker to live, it was *how* I wanted him to die.

I always envisioned Luke Skywalker going out in the biggest way possible, lightsaber in one hand, blaster in the other, standing on top of an X-wing—not in it, on it—as he took down two more Death Stars. Epic, grand, the dreams of a ten-year-old. His death would come at the end of a blade or in an explosion that we all watched with bittersweet dread. It would be a fitting Star Wars death as deaths in this franchise are often rather violent. You're either cut in half, blasted into bits, or vaporized by a superweapon. Only Yoda got to experience a quiet, humble, dignified death. So, it would make sense that I would spend my years as a Star Wars fan gearing up for Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight, to go out on his shield. However, that wasn't Luke's journey. He was here for something more.

In *Return of the Jedi*, as we say over and over again, Luke threw down his blade. (Even more thoughts on that to come.) From there, he began a quest to discover what it really meant to be a Jedi and who he really was going to be in that role. As we learned when he spoke to Del Meeko on Pillio, his philosophy centered around

making the choice to be better. His choices continued to take him away from the idea of being a great warrior. Like his mentors before him, he wanted to be a great teacher, a beacon for being better. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum—or the next superweapon, I guess—he failed. Luke Skywalker, the great legend and hero of the galaxy, failed. When Rey climbs those steps at the end of *The Force Awakens*, he is not Luke Skywalker so much as he is a memory of him, and it was a fascinating take on the character. He had failed and locked himself away, but the Force found him. We all wanted him to take that blade from Rey's hand and charge down the mountain. However, he was not ready to make that choice and, more importantly, he was no longer sure that was the right choice.

Luke Skywalker's journey in *The Last Jedi* is a challenging work of art. Up close and as it forms in front of you, it's mystifying, complex, and confronts your own expectations of what being a hero is. Of what being a hero is for Luke at this point in his life. You're focusing on each stroke of the brush, awed by some, dubious of others, and not seeing what the artist is painting. It's when you pull back that you see that entire piece. What all of it means. Luke Skywalker had thrown down his blade and gained victory over violence by choosing peace and accepting death rather than killing his own father. Theoretically, the next time he picks up his blade, there are some good intentions in the act. He felt Ben Solo had already turned and become a sleeping dark side giant. However, Luke chooses violence in that moment and loses everything, setting the galaxy aflame. He's not just going to pick up his weapon again. He's going to make the choice to be better than he was before.

When you see the entire painting, you discover a vision of Luke Skywalker as he really is. He is still a legend and will always be a myth, but he is just one man, burden by his own legacy, and Luke has learned that you should never put your trust in just one

person. One person is fallible, sometimes weak, and, though each and every individual is important to the cause, Luke wanted the galaxy to focus on more than just him because, at some point, he was not going to be there. Yet, he was very clearly aware of what he had become to the galaxy at large and, as he starts to recover from his malaise, the fog of failure that has him ready to throw it all away, Luke realizes what his true value is now. He is not only Rey's mentor. In a way, he's the galaxy's mentor and everyone had to grow beyond him. They have to finish this journey on their own.

And that's the final part of my own journey to accepting this end. Star Wars deaths answer to a higher calling within this tale. Luke Skywalker *was* the hero of many generations. He was who many looked up to and learned from. My visions of his grand departure from the story were in keeping with what I had seen before. Violent. Brutal. Traumatic. Though he was in pain, the Force projection did take every fiber of his being, and here was Luke Skywalker, our Luke Skywalker, being called home by the Force. His last act in this form was an infinitely inspiring one that kept in line with the person Luke Skywalker had decided to be all those years ago but served the purpose of the legendary figure he had become. He didn't just stand before the First Order on Crait for the surviving Resistance to see, he stood there for all of the galaxy to see. He went out on his own terms. This truly was a death of great peace and purpose.

Luke Skywalker died today.

I wasn't ready for it, but as I look at the entire story, I can no longer imagine it any other way.



## 9

**THE MASK OF VADER****DARTH VADER IS BORN**

*Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

“But, like, did Darth Vader always have that mask on?”

It was the summer of 1983, I was about eight and my mother did not have that information. In an era long before Wookieepedia, podcasts, and tweeting Lucasfilm story group members until they block you, my mother had the burden of answering these important questions for me. The only problem was that she didn’t know the answers.

“I think so. He needed it to breathe, or something, so he had to wear it,” she answered, probably, or something like that. I can recall the moment with some clarity, but most of my mind was focused on that mask and the feeble man that had looked out at all of us when his son helped him to remove it on the floor of the second Death Star. I wanted to know. This was important. I just watched the Rebels win and celebrate. The Emperor was gone. Darth Vader was Luke’s father, that I understood, but that can’t just happen. Right? This all seemed so sad.

“How did that happen?” I asked one last time. My mother was loading groceries into the back of our blue Subaru station wagon because when you grow up in the 1980s, you have to embrace it.

She was searching for the one answer that would satiate my quest for truth in the galaxy. She knew I wouldn't stop until I heard something final. With a shrug of both love and annoyance only a parent could give, she finally answered.

"He fell to the dark side."

That, it turns out, was very right. Anakin Skywalker *fell* to the dark side. He didn't ascend to the position of Lord of the Sith. This wasn't an intergalactic promotion. He didn't strive for it like reaching his quarterly business sales goals. Anakin was ensnared by Palpatine's plan and gave into his deepest fears. He was targeted, tricked, coerced and even carried the burden of being prophesied, but at the end of all those excuses, you find one of Star Wars' most powerful lessons. The choices you make define you. You either do good or are trapped by the bad choices you make. Once you start down that dark path, as that Yoda guy said, "forever will it dominate your destiny."

Anakin Skywalker fell and was now a prisoner.

Star Wars is a fast and intense journey through the belief in hope, the search for yourself, and navigating the waters of morality that stretch out in front of you. It's loud, it's vibrant, and, above all, inspirational. Yet, to highlight this point, this one powerful warning about what you do and how that affects you, George Lucas went quiet.

In the closing moments of *Revenge of the Sith*, what was left of Anakin Skywalker lies wrenching and screaming on a cold slab in one of Palpatine's lairs. Medical droids whirl and click about him as they transform into the very image of terror and evil the galaxy would soon fear. Anakin may have already been called Darth Vader by this point, but this is when he is truly born. It's mesmerizing,

claustrophobic, and haunting. It's George Lucas the artist crafting a perfect sonnet. An ode to Vader's pain.

Every piece of this sequence works in perfect concert, from John Williams' always stellar score to the intercutting of the birth of Luke and Leia and death of Padmé. Each stanza builds until we reach the crescendo: the mask, that iconic visage of evil that stretched out beyond Star Wars itself to become known worldwide. It haunts that galaxy, and ours. As it lowers onto Anakin, we see through the mask. This will be his world now.

Everything he sees will be now be filtered, altered, and sterilized. Even the light from the medical bay is dimmed, turned into the red hue that will dominate his vision. Nothing will be seen through his own eyes. Vader is now part of this machine. As it lowers down, Anakin's eyes go wide with fear. Though there will be times the mask comes off, by his choice or in battle, that will always be what happens to Darth Vader. What we're watching now are the final moments of Anakin Skywalker. These are the last seconds he will see for himself until years later when his son saves him in that moment in *Return of the Jedi* that created all these questions.<sup>5</sup>

Here, now, though, George Lucas focuses all of our attention on that mask. Strains of "The Imperial March" are heard as smoke rises off of the suit now keeping this man alive. All sounds fade away, except for those of the mask sealing shut. The path he chose to walk down has led him to here. Darth Vader has been locked in his tomb.

We had many questions about Darth Vader. Did he always have that mask? How did this happen? Who *was* Darth Vader? As the mask covered the burned face of a man once called Anakin, we finally

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<sup>5</sup> Do yourself a favor and reread the death of Darth Vader in James Kahn's 1983 novelization of *Return of the Jedi*. The heart wrenching description of Vader feeling the tears of his son on his face as he breathes his final breath adds tremendous depth to an already legendary movie moment.

learned that Darth Vader was a man who was afraid and very aware in those final moments that he had made the wrong choice. Star Wars's most tragic lesson.

## 8

# HAN SOLO RETURNS

## THE SIMPLE JOY OF STAR WARS

*Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

Star Wars took over the world in 1977. This, we know. There are a multitude of reasons why, most of them centered around the universal themes presented in this modern myth connecting to the subconsciousness of us all. Yep. Yep. It's true. All of it. But um...erm...also, you know, it was fun. Star Wars is really fun. There are big lessons that lead to important choices and actions, but never underestimate the value of joy. Sometimes, you want to stand up and cheer.

Enter Han Solo.

Or rather...Han Solo returned.

With Luke Skywalker racing toward the Death Star's exposed exhaust port and Darth Vader bearing down on him, Han Solo and the Mighty Chewbacca return to take out the TIE fighters flanking Vader and send the Dark Lord spinning out of control with the best "what?" ever uttered on film. With a mighty rebel yell, Solo and Chewbacca have cleared the way for Luke to fire the fateful shot that destroys the Death Star. The day has been saved, medals for everyone. (Not for you, though, Chewbacca. At least not on film.) There was more to Han Solo than money.

Which means, of course, there is depth to this scene. There always is. Han Solo's story leads to or tracks back to this moment. It's as if Han's life is divided into two parts. The bumpy road of a young smuggler who was invested in individuals, but never wanted to belong to something other than himself, and the Han that knew deep down what he always feared—he's a good guy. He knows he came back to save the day just as much as anyone and he can't escape it, no matter how much he tries. It's the constant push and pull of his character that runs up until the very end of his life. It's no small detail that once Lucas realized he could keep telling his story on screen in *Episode V*, the first thing he, Lawrence Kasdan, and company have Han Solo do is run away. There was still much for him to learn, but he always comes back and no return bigger than this moment. The impact of his return here flows from the depth that proceeds it, yet it will always be celebrated for the exhilarating joy it brings. As it should be. It's earned and that makes it a special kind of Star Wars joy you wish you could relive all over again.

Though, in a way, you can...

In 2013, makeup and special-effects artist William Forsche uploaded to YouTube an audio recording that he had made as a thirteen-year-old during his second viewing of *A New Hope* in 1977. While we should not normally encourage the unauthorized recordings of movies, audio or otherwise, we'll check on the statute of limitations for him, Forsche's recording serves as an emotional time capsule and testament to this moment's power. When the *Millennium Falcon* comes out of nowhere to save the day, the audience bursts into applause. More cheers follow when the Death Star explodes. Listening to it doesn't just transport you to 1977 as a straightforward study in Star Wars history, but it takes you to whenever you first saw this yourself and whenever you first fell love with Star Wars.

Han Solo had left. He took the money and ran. Though he seemed a bit sad about it, he still did it and that hurts. It really hurts. We liked this guy. We liked Chewbacca. They all escaped the Death Star together. DON'T THEY SEE LUKE AND LEIA NEED THEM?

Sorry. Sorry. Runs deep.

But Han Solo did return! Chewbacca as well, and everything was going to be alright. The bad guys lost. The scoundrel came back. As the flickering remains of the Death Star disperse throughout the stars, one thing emerges and that is joy. Pure jubilation. When you hear that 1977 audience cheer, it highlights that Star Wars often succeeds the most when it gives you that joy of hope or confirms that it's still there and your choices can lead you to it. This doesn't mean that it can't get dark, that Star Wars can't challenge you and make you think. Your heroes should be allowed to move about the board, failing, struggling, and learning these lessons along with you, but that 1977 audience didn't just want that joy, they needed it.

At this moment, you don't have to worry about what will become of Han. How his struggles with his identity and commitment to causes will wane and waver up until his death. There will be time for those discussions later. For now, as the *Millennium Falcon* comes exploding out of the stars to clear away the bad guy and let our hero make the one-in-a-million shot to save the galaxy, all you have to do is cheer.

## 7

**THE EYES OF LEIA****PAIN, LOSS, AND THE COST OF HOPE***Star Wars: Episode VIII—The Last Jedi*

Writer: Rian Johnson

Director: Rian Johnson

*The Last Jedi* is a beautiful film.

Rian Johnson, cinematographer Steve Yedlin, the production designers, the visual effects artists, the gaffers, the production assistant that made sure everyone had coffee, and anyone that had a hand in crafting this film deserves every ounce of credit for giving us piece after piece of breathtaking Star Wars art. It's everywhere in the film. The violent imagery of the exploding Resistance bombers, Rey on a ledge practicing her lightsaber skills against the backdrop of the Ahch-To sea, Luke Skywalker defiantly standing before the forces of the First Order, and the epic tableau of Kylo Ren and his former master facing off before the storms of Crait. All of them and more are works of art and each shot belongs in a museum, to paraphrase another legend in another time. However, the centerpiece of this collection is the eyes of Leia.

It's a brief moment in the film that barely stretches over one second in real time, but it encompasses an entire lifetime. A princess turned general awaits at the mouth of a forgotten Rebel base on Crait that she hopes will save the Resistance and she stares out into the horizon, waiting for the arrival of her enemy and perhaps her



final fate. Leia Organa's face is hidden by the collar of her majestic outfit and all we see are her eyes. And the eyes of Leia do tell the story.

Leia's entire life has come to this moment. Though surrounded by a small band of Resistance fighters, Leia Organa is now alone. It's as if she is looking back through time and reliving all of the causes she fought for, all the risks she took, and remembering all that have died or gone. This is the pain and loss behind the hope her entire existence was built on.

Leia's past is littered with the memories of those who are gone. Her birth mother Padmé who died as she was born, who she was connected to perhaps only through the Force, but whose leadership and fortitude coursed through her veins. Her birth father who died on that day as well, becoming a figure that cast a shadow over her life that she struggles to escape. Her first love Kier Domadi, who challenged her beliefs in the best of ways, and whose lock of hair she kept in a chest the rest of her days. Leia's gaze drifts out through time to her adoptive parents Bail and Breha, who gave her a life of purpose and instilled beliefs in her that never wavered, even after they were erased in the blink an eye on Alderaan. Her precious Alderaan, a beautiful planet and people she watched die with those same eyes but could not stop to grieve for.

As she stands there on Crait on the brink of a final battle, Leia knows the cost of war. She's watched countless Rebels die—those she's led, those fresh-faced idealists trying to topple an Empire, and those she served with, like General Jan Dodonna and Captain Raymus Antilles, who died in the crushing hands of Vader while trying in vain to protect her. She had coaxed Admiral Gial Ackbar out of retirement to once again fight at her side and her childhood friend Amilyn Holdo proudly stood there as well. Both were now gone.

Her own husband, long struggling with his true identity and commitments, returned finally, only to die while attempting to fulfill her last request of Han Solo: save their son. He was gone, too, murdered by that son. Ben Solo was a casualty, too, his great purpose forever twisted and his destiny on a dark path. She had sent him away to train with her brother and essentially lost them both. Luke Skywalker had vanished, destroyed over his own failures, leaving Leia to fight alone.

Loss after loss.

Yet, the biggest loss was herself. Leia, Princess of Alderaan, made her life about others. In a world of heroes' journeys and great redemptions, Leia had discovered who she was early on and never had time to change it. A compassionate soul, a fearless leader, and a fighter until the end, Leia served the greater good, always. Even a chance to become a Jedi was pushed away because, after the fall of the Empire, Leia knew she needed to rebuild the Republic. She had no time to lock herself away and become a Jedi. The galaxy needed her as a leader. It always came back to the cause, never to her.

It's all there. Every memory flickering behind those eyes.

After a second, we move on. Just as Leia always had to.

Princess Leia Organa, now a general, always a general, represents the best in Star Wars. In a story of morality and choices, strengths and victories, heroes and villains, Leia remained at its core, speaking up, staying to fight, always helping, always leading. In a dark time, she was the bright beacon of hope. As she looks out over the surface of Crait, those eyes, the eyes of Leia, the eyes of Carrie Fisher, tell the story of a life lived to the fullest and a life that was not easy, but a life that was worth it. Even though she still feels the

pain of each and every loss, you know, as you stare back at those eyes, that Leia would never want to be anywhere else.

Those eyes are work of art.

## 6

# NO, I AM YOUR FATHER

## THE REVELATION THAT ~~SHOCKED~~ CHANGED THE GALAXY

*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & Leigh Brackett

Director: Irvin Kershner

Where were you when you found out Darth Vader was Luke Skywalker's father? Sitting in disbelief at a suburban multiplex in May 1980? At a friend's house while a VHS tape played? While watching the special editions in 1997? Or when Homer Simpson spoiled it while walking out of the theater and you were still in line? Regardless of where or when, at some point, you found out. Everyone did. People know this fact even if they haven't yet seen it (they even know the quote—kinda). Darth Vader revealing the truth about being Luke Skywalker's father is perhaps the signature moment in *Star Wars*. There are lightsabers, Wookiees, and the intergalactic battle of good and evil, but above it all stands Vader, fist clinched, cape flowing in the Bespin breeze, revealing the soul-shattering truth to Luke. It shocked the fandom first, but then changed the story forever.

The full impact of the scene is on display when you go back to 1980 and sift through the memories of fans' first reactions to this reveal. It's often described as a gut punch, heart-wrenching, and, most frequently, shocking. Fans could NOT believe this was true. Vader was lying. There was no possible way this was happening. It was all

a ruse! (A ruse, I say!) Star Wars fans would have to wait three years to get their answer and this may have been the first-time traditions of modern fandom like debating, theorizing, and just plain guessing rose to prominence. *The Empire Strikes Back* bravely raised a lot of questions like will Han survive, who was the “other one” that Yoda was speaking about, and how did Cliff from *Cheers* make it to Hoth? But the biggest question had to do with the shock of the moment. Was Vader *actually* Luke’s father?

Once the shock wears off and the truth sets in, the ramification of the moment is understood. This is a revelation that shifts the Star Wars saga. Luke Skywalker once dreamed about being in the center of the fight, but now he has just learned that he is attached to the very evil that he has been fighting. Becoming the hero was no longer about medals and saving the day. Now, he’s on a collision course to confront and destroy his father. This is high-stakes poker now, my young Padawans.

For his part, Darth Vader had long been struggling with his identity and place in the Emperor’s Galactic Empire, but now he just laid *his* cards on the table. He wants to destroy his master and by acknowledging he has a son, he’s acknowledging that that he is—or was—Anakin Skywalker. This comes after years and years of fighting to overcome that truth. Vader’s plans are still very much nefarious, yes, yes, but he’s one step closer to the redemption he’ll eventually find. Anakin Skywalker had to defeat Darth Vader and that only happens if Vader accepts that he is still that man on some level.

Everything changes and it had to.

Irvin Kershner wasn’t given a big climatic battle to take this movie home. No one was blowing up superweapons this time. Imagine being asked to direct the sequel to the biggest movie in history

to that point and you're told that your movie ends with the hero going off to face down the villain to save his friends and he *fails* at it. Sure, it's easy now to toss around a cinephile talking point like the "second chapter of trilogies are darker" but try actually pulling it off. Kershner and company couldn't base this scene on the shock value, there had to be substance. A reason for the reveal. Just simply saying your main character is secretly related to someone we already know does not make for an interesting story alone. There has to be some meat on that bone.

That's where it succeeds the most. It is an intimate, personal scene clothed in the grand specter of Star Wars. This is happening deep within a floating city in the clouds, following a vicious fight with laser swords, but it is played as real world as it can be. David Prowse and James Earl Jones combined to give Vader an earnest thirst for power. He wants to take over the world, but it definitely reads as Vader really wanting to conquer the galaxy with his son. In response, Mark Hamill plays this scene perfectly. You're right there with Luke's pain. Hamill, acting off of placeholder dialogue, makes this more than a plot twist. It's his own personal horror.

It's all perfect. Just like they planned it from the beginning. Or prior to this movie. Or...well...when *did* they plan it? The stories behind the making of Star Wars have become just as important and legendary as the final products themselves. It's like Beatles fans knowing what John Lennon had for lunch while recording "Yer Blues." (I think it was a cold turkey and glass onion sandwich.) Yet, like a lot of behind-the-scenes tales, the actual facts are often buried in a Dagobah-like fog. Did George Lucas always intend for Darth Vader to be Luke Skywalker's father? The answer often depends on which documentary you're watching or what book you're reading. At best, George had it all written in pencil, but there is no need to get lost in those tall tales of how this came to be. What remains is

that Darth Vader was revealed to be Luke Skywalker's father in *The Empire Strikes Back* and it shockingly changed absolutely everything.

## 5

**PALPATINE****EMPEROR, CHANCELLOR, AND THE  
PHANTOM MENACE OF IT ALL**

Star Wars

Creator: George Lucas

Actor: Ian McDiarmid

He is the embodiment of evil. A master of the dark side. A true Sith Lord. The devil behind it all. And he is *the* Phantom Menace that is at the center of all the conflict in the galaxy. And it's presented with bombastic gusto and glowering glee by a stage actor that relishes every second of his time with the character. All hail Palpatine, the true villain in Star Wars.

We're not here to take anything away from Darth Vader, mind you. Good ol' Darth emerged as one of the most iconic villains in all of cinema, following his menacing debut in 1977, and he continued to build on that legacy with each film. That's understandable. He deserves the accolades and the multiple covers of *Time* magazine. The character was immediately memorable and timeless. Vader was positioned as *the* Big Bad in *A New Hope*, despite clearly having to answer in part to Governor Tarkin and not getting much respect from those conniving Imperial officers. Those details weren't yet being combed over by obsessives like myself ("Um, actually, Admiral Conan Antonio Motti didn't care for Vader..."). Vader was the villain. The Emperor was only a brief mention, an Easter Egg from Tarkin, before getting one FaceTime call in *Empire Strikes*



*Back*. It is only in *Return of the Jedi* that we got to see the full power and glory of the Emperor and he confidently arrives just in time for Darth Vader's redemption and his own fall.

When George Lucas finally got to tell all six episodes of his story, Darth Vader, by design, was less and less the villain of the series, he was more a victim. In a few *Revenge of the Sith* featurettes from 2005, Lucas gleefully proclaims that Palpatine is the true villain of Star Wars. "He's the devil," says The Creator. Producer Rick McCallum adds, "He has manipulated this whole saga." And he most definitely has. It's not about the semantics of who was the actual villain either. It's about the pure joy of watching the Emperor's rise.

In the character of Palpatine, Star Wars fans are blessed with the simmering sinister sizzle of a classic horror monster. He's Dracula with a lightsaber, lurking in the shadows, pulling his strings, and chewing up the scenery. And then it explodes into a fiery feast of ferociousness. Ian McDiarmid doesn't hold back and, in *Revenge of the Sith* alone, he delivers beat after beat of glorious, meme-worthy villainy. And every second should be cherished.

I've always understood why someone might watch the prequels, particularly *Episode III*, and come away with the critique that Palpatine is over the top. He absolutely is. When he blurts out, "Do it," (or more appropriately "Dew it,") takes every beat he can to relish the story of killing his master, pleads with Anakin to use his power, and, most notably, uses every ounce of his outrageousness to strike back against Mace Windu, the Emperor is figuratively twirling his mustache with no reservations. It is truly over the top. Which is exactly what we need from the biggest villain in the land.

The Emperor we see in *Return of the Jedi* is quietly overconfident. He's cocksure and believes that nothing is happening that he hasn't already foreseen. He has a reason to be comfortable with everything

going on. Palpatine has been in power for over twenty years. His Empire is in place and Vader's been doing his dirty work while an entire cadre of leaders, some bumbling, most coldly capable, have been oppressing the galaxy for him. He's not worried about the Rebellion. His eyes have been focused on what else is out there for him. Unconquered realms in the Unknown Regions. Mysterious signs of the dark side out there for him to use. Secrets and relics from the past. He's an old man looking to extend his reach and his life. McDiarmid plays it as such, perfectly. However, coming back to play the same role thirty (then twenty) in-story years earlier gave the veteran stage performer a chance to rediscover a man on the move.

The Palpatine of the prequels is thirsty for that power we later see him have. He's playing the game of politics and having to walk quietly among his pawns. It's an intriguing balancing act, full of great tension in how far, deep, and long he can play it. In *The Clone Wars* series, we get to watch that stretch out even more. The wise, warm leader covering up the cold, calculating dictator within. Palpatine keeps moving his chess pieces until he finally gets a checkmate. And that's when it all explodes. McDiarmid plays it as a man reaching goals and finding himself unopposed. He's downright giddy with the power. *Revenge of the Sith* is a victory party for Palpatine...and he can gloat if he wants to.

There are many great villains in Star Wars. And, often, a story is only as good as its villain. Vader certainly counts and undeniable dominates the story of the original trilogy with his tragic quest for internal peace. Darth Maul brought an unchecked lust for violence and vengeance. Count Dooku questioned the intentions of the Jedi and brought grace and reason to the dark side. Asajj Ventress represented coiled-up righteous rage. General Grievous was the quest for power at the cost of your humanity. (Or Kaleeshness, rather.) Kylo Ren is a bundle of misplaced anger, crushing

expectations, and neglect that we're still figuring out. Along the way, there have been many vile gangsters and deadly bounty hunters. We've had to deal with crooked politicians and scheming military leaders. The Star Wars galaxy has its wonderful fill of all that is bad and evil. But, among them all, only one rose to the very top of where you can go, cackling and manipulating all the way, until he reached what everyone else always wanted.

Power.

Unlimited Power.

## 4

**TWIN SUNS****WANDERLUST IN THAT GALAXY AND OURS**

*Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

In June 1994, the sun was setting on my life as a high school student at Arroyo Grande High School, nestled between the coast and the hills on California's Central Coast. Graduation day brought with it the traditional bundle of emotions. That mixed-bag feeling of breaking free while wondering what comes next or if anything comes next at all. As I drove away from my school in an old 1981 Ford Fairmont I had dubbed the *Millennium Fairmont* because that's the youth I chose to have, I looked toward the horizon and the ample rolling sand dunes of Pismo Beach. The ocean stretched out until it touched the fading sun. I didn't know what was coming next, but I sensed an entire world out there for me to experience. It just seemed so far away. At the lowest point of my ennui, I laughed. I was just like Luke Skywalker staring off toward the twin sons of Tatooine in the iconic shot that connected with us all.

Fresh off *American Graffiti*, George Lucas was continuing to reach the burgeoning adults in all of us. The world then was on fire in a post-Vietnam and Watergate era and Lucas was certainly commenting on the politics and outlook of the day, but he wrapped it all up in wonder and hope. At the center of it all is Luke Skywalker, our point of view into this tale of "heroes, villains, and aliens from a thousand

worlds.” The audience then, and the generations to come, would connect with this wanderlust in another galaxy and feel it in our own. This is *the* moment of that connection.

A sequence of events proceeds it, slowing building up to Luke’s frustrating, youthful kick of the sand as he approaches his soon-to-be legendary vantage point. First, he’s always felt like there’s more to this life than moisture farming, but he could never quite see it. It was always right there in front of him, just out of reach. Some of his closest friends, like Biggs Darklighter and Tank, have started to find their way out, but here he is, doing chores and cleaning these new droids. It’s then that Luke is shown the partial recording of Princess Leia’s call for help. Beyond just being dazzled by this vision (hold that thought, Luke), our farm boy hero is now exposed to the galaxy at large. He’s no longer just watching the world through his macrobinoculars or hearing rumors of rebellions, the adventure he craves is right in front of him now.

His only perceived way out is to join the Imperial Academy, but crusty, old Uncle Owen is determined to keep him locked away for another year. Replace the blue milk with a soda—or maybe now a low calorie, naturally sweetened carbonated water—and this scenario keeps playing out in our own world over and over. Like Luke, we all want to push away from the dinner table, and we all find ourselves, at one point or another, on that figurative hill looking out at the great beyond.

What’s often remembered as one long stare, mostly because that is the single shot we associate with this scene, is actually much more. The saga of Luke’s longing plays out in three distinct acts. His first look is somewhat hopeful. He’s frustrated, yes, but he knows there is something else out there for him. That’s followed by a bow of his head as if Luke can’t possibly imagine himself getting off this rock, but he looks back up anyway. That’s the hope of the scene. Its soul.

There's always hope, especially in Star Wars. As John Williams' "Binary Sunset" score grabs our attention for the first time in the movie (though it does play earlier when Leia gives R2-D2 the Death Star plans), Luke walks away and begrudgingly returns to the life he doesn't want, unsure of what's next. Longing, doubt, wanderlust, and sense of being so far from where you want to be are the feelings we connect with, but Luke Skywalker is unknowingly already on the path to fulfilling his destiny. That is the true strength of this scene. It's only about thirty-five seconds long, but if there is an emotional center to the entire Star Wars story, this is it.

We knew then, and definitely know now, that Luke Skywalker escapes the planet that's far from the bright center of the galaxy and becomes something more powerful than he ever could have imagined. He doesn't just join the fight, he wins the fight and goes on to become the most powerful Jedi around while leaving behind a legacy of hope and inspiration that will never fade. As we all watch Luke stare off into the twin suns, *we* know he is already on his way. And as I stared off beyond my hometown, looking toward my dreams, and you look into your horizon as well, we only have to know that like Luke Skywalker, Star Wars is assuring us that the journey has already begun.

## 3

**THE BIG THREE****HAN, LUKE, AND LEIA***Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*

Writer: George Lucas

Director: George Lucas

At some point, you think you've seen it all when it comes to Star Wars. You know all the behind-the-scenes stories, you've seen all the "never before published" photos and found all the rarest of the rare interviews. Then, one day, something comes your way and you're stunned to learn it slipped through the cracks of your fandom but not-so-secretly pleased you get to see something new. So was the case with me when my friend, storyteller and writer Dan Farren, passed me a shaky DVD copy of the old Mike Douglas show. Co-hosted by bona fide '70s TV star Richard Thomas in the summer of 1977, the show features Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford, and Mark Hamill, the stars of that brand-new space movie *Star Wars*. The interview can be found online (what can't), but I had just never seen it. It never popped up on my radar screen. But in my hands now was a broadcast copy of the show. It skips and jumps, cracks and pops, but, complete with commercials, young kids reading poetry, and baseball stars Pete Rose and Tom Seaver, it is an absolute time capsule, a monument to the era where Star Wars was just beginning to shape our world.

Though coming two months after the release of *A New Hope*, the movie and its stars are still treated like a mysterious curiosity.

Mike Douglas talks about the box office success (“It’s now ahead of *Jaws*”), but no one quite knew what was happening. Carrie Fisher comes out first because, as the daughter of Hollywood royalty Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, they at least had something to talk about. Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill come out after the commercial break. Carrie is smart, poignant, and funny as always but muted, as if she is still playing the game instead of smashing through it the way she later learns to. Harrison is charmingly distant, but not yet as prickly as he wanted to be. Mark Hamill is as genuine as he is now, but still every bit the wide-eyed kid he portrayed on screen. It’s a different time and era, but what you see is clear. This is the Big Three. The heart of the Star Wars’ spirit.

Princess Leia, Han Solo, and Luke Skywalker don’t have to be some of your favorite characters (though they most likely are). This isn’t about that. The Star Wars universe has continued to roll out memorable and inspirational characters. More are on the way. Nien Nunb, Max Rebo, or Meeber Gascon might be more to your liking but that doesn’t matter. What does matter is that these are the three faces of this franchise. The ones on whose backs this house was built.

*A New Hope* is where the bond of the Big Three was formed, both with each other and the audience. I’m particularly drawn to the many moments during the escape from the Death Star, after Leia has been freed from her cell and the trash compactor sequence ends, and the three of them run around finding themselves as characters and co-stars. At one point during the action, Han, Luke, and Leia come to a stop, side by side, in one shot. It’s a moment frozen in time, used often as a press shot and forever burned into our brains: the heroes of Star Wars, then and now, generation after generation, discovering themselves in these three characters.



They were perfectly matched. Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford bring it up on the classic interview with Mike Douglas. The three of them were brought together by George Lucas and it was either them or three other completely different names. It was designed to be an ensemble. Kurt Russell, William Katt, and Cindy Williams could have got the gig, and nothing would have been the same. The chemistry was the key. Sometimes, in these real-life stories behind the making of the movies that change us all, something magical happens and the fates align. These are not just the right choices. They are *the* choices. Each one embodied their respective roles. As Carrie Fisher once said, "I think I am Princess Leia, and Princess Leia is me. It's like a Moebius strip." It was all there in the DNA.

George Lucas created this wonderful world we all love to play in, and he never could have imagined how much it would grow, expand, and keep going. The characters, moments, and memories are many, each one carrying their own significance and purpose. Yet, there will never be another Big Three. There can't be. As I watched them all explain to a slightly bewildered but sincere Mike Douglas the very nature of their characters, I was struck at how it was all there at the beginning: the dashing rogue with the rough exterior, the good-natured soul of destiny, and the vibrant daughter of royalty fighting her own way through life. Harrison, Mark, and Carrie explained what the characters were and remained so perfectly. They knew them. They were them. They will always be them. The very center of the Star Wars universe.

## 2

**"I AM A JEDI"****THE LAST STAND OF LUKE SKYWALKER AND  
THE REDEMPTION OF DARTH VADER**

*Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*

Writers: Lawrence Kasdan & George Lucas

Director: Richard Marquand

All roads lead to the Emperor's throne room! While the Rebellion takes its final shot at the dreaded Galactic Empire on the surface of Endor and the stars above, Luke Skywalker has bravely slipped off to confront Emperor Palpatine and save Darth Vader. Full of high stakes and interpersonal drama, this sequence is the resolution of decades of storytelling and has implications for everything that would come after it. So, is this the greatest sequence in Star Wars? Can we even answer that? We do love Star Wars and the quest for that answer is never far from our hearts and minds.

Yet, honestly, how can we really determine whether this is the best scene or sequence in Star Wars? You and I have been on a long journey to get to this very point and here's where we're at. I have to come clean. We can't really determine this. It's impossible. Art is subjective, Star Wars even more so. You might react more to the scene in which Princess Leia feeds Wicket a snack and you wouldn't be wrong. (In fact, my love of snacks has me listening to your reasons intently.) The throne room sequence is also part of the larger final act of *Return of the Jedi*, so some of the greatness comes from the pacing and intercutting with that great Battle of Endor

itself. However, when you pull apart the sequence and take it in as its own, you find the very fate of the galaxy's spirit being determined between three souls. Let's walk into the Emperor's throne room. Which is, yes, my favorite scene in Star Wars.

This is the last stand of Luke Skywalker. After three movies in the pursuit of victory over evil and the title of Jedi, Luke's journey has come down to his grand plan of distraction. He'll waltz into the belly of the beast, keep Sheev and Darth distracted long enough until the second Death Star blinks out of existence, and head off to the great Force ghosts party in the sky. Except the Emperor has foreseen that (and pretty much everything) and, as the Death Star starts picking off Rebel ships, Luke is faced with a hard truth. He's not getting out of this without a fight and it's a fight he can't win without dancing close to the shadows of the dark side. Which is a delicious layer added as you mature as a fan.

As a kid, I was begging Luke to grab that beautiful green lightsaber and start fighting! After all, we had just watched him use that blade to cut up a speeder bike in mid-flight and take down Jabba's henchmen with ease (while Leia poetically removed Jabba himself). It makes perfect sense that Luke should activate that saber and end this thing. It's only through time, and many repeated viewings through the remaining days of my youth into my arrested development years, that you see Luke straining at every turn to not fight. By the time he is hiding underneath the stairs, the lesson of his journey so far emerges; everything he's learned and every skill he has lead him to the knowledge that he cannot win by fighting. So, that's when it falls apart. That's when his frightened mind betrays his own sister and Vader knows where to get him. Jedi use their power for knowledge or defense, but, here, Luke strikes out against Vader, screaming as he launches at his father. What follows is my personal favorite **shot** in my favorite scene in all of Star Wars.

Green and red blades clash as John Williams brings in a choir of voices into the spotlight for the first time in the series. As Luke taps into his anger, bringing his desire to protect his sister dangerously close to the edge of darkness, he gains the advantage. Some mighty hacks of the blade and Vader is down, hand gone, and gasping for air. Every lesson from the last three movies, every chapter of Luke's fabled hero's journey comes down to this moment. Choices, morality, and the desire to rise above the pull of the dark side all comes down to the decision Luke makes before the cackling Emperor.

He throws down his lightsaber.

Now he knows how his father fell. Now he knows that he cannot fight. He is a Jedi, like his father before him. When it comes to the original trilogy, this is the climactic moment. The battle continues, the war is soon over, but Luke Skywalker's victory has been achieved without violence. This is the act that leads to the redemption of Darth Vader.

Which pulls to a close the six chapters of the saga. If you listen to George Lucas, the answer to the question of what order to watch these first six movies in is rather clear. *Episode I* through *Episode VI*. This is the rise, fall, and redemption of Anakin Skywalker. So, now we can watch this with our eyes on Vader. The long-simmering fear inside Darth Vader, that he was and is still Anakin Skywalker at his core, has now raced to the surface. His son's compassion has quickly turned to a sacrifice. You can almost feel himself reconnecting with that young boy on Tatooine whose heart was full of the desire to help others and the instinct to care. Six chapters now build to *this* moment in the life of Anakin. He strikes out against his master. The cost of his redemption was his life and it shouldn't have been any other way (Vader *does* spend twenty-years doing some

pretty heinous things) but the act brings balance to the Force. The Emperor is dead, and the Empire has begun to fall.

This is the final road connected to this sequence. It's the road that stretches far out ahead into the sequel trilogy and the stories that lead to them. The Empire has fallen, but out of the ashes rises the First Order. The Republic must rise as well, fraught with the problems all governments face and racked with the scars of this Rebellion. Luke Skywalker is the last Jedi, but, keeping with his final lesson, he has begun a quest for knowledge and is not primed to be the great guardian of *this* galaxy. He's primed to reshape the Jedi Order. Challenges lie ahead for him, but he'll always return to the type of Jedi he became in that throne room.

All roads do lead back to this sequence. Back to the Emperor's throne room. Back to the moment Luke Skywalker throws down his weapon. Does that make it the best moment in all of Star Wars? Is this the one sequence all others look to? You tell me. All that I know, in the end, is that every line of sharp troubling truths from the Emperor, tortured pain from Vader, and hopeful honor in Luke, every moment of the duel, every moment of the score, every image and beat of tension, doubt, violence, and, finally, peace, feels perfect.

It all feels like Star Wars.

1

# **A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY**

## **THE MOMENT RIGHT BEFORE A NEW ADVENTURE BEGINS...**

Star Wars

Creator: George Lucas

The crowd buzzes with anticipation, excitement, and a little healthy dose of nervousness. Speculative whispers can be heard up and down the aisles. Cosplayers, wearing costumes of characters they've yet to meet but already love, roam around the theater. Kids ask their parents questions about the story so far. Older fans make one more, all-important run to the bathroom, forcing nature as to not miss a second. The lights go low and the tension rises one more level. Trailers and ignored public service announcements about cell phones and talking stretch out the wait. Then, finally, the Lucasfilm logo shimmers onto the screen and the magic words appear...

*A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...*

There is always a cheer, applause, hoots, and hollers, but my favorite sound is the small beat of complete silence when those words fade away and cede the spotlight to the opening strains of John Williams' booming main theme. The music takes over everything, the first sounds of the movie taking us to the beginning of a new chapter in the Star Wars saga.

It is in that silence, that small beat, that the entire world of possibilities in Star Wars explodes out of your mind. With each new story—whether it be a movie or television episode, a novel or comic book—the Star Wars saga gets bigger and, with it, comes the hope of something new inspiring you all over again. The new characters, ships, and sequences are still in front of you. Everything you know and love about Star Wars is racing through your mind as you wonder what you are about to add to that list. We live for that moment.

Each new piece of the saga is also fully engrained in the world that has been built before it. Everything new ties back to what came before. It stretches out the boundaries and takes us to new places, but it always has a comforting tinge of familiarity. It feels like Star Wars.

As the next movie starts, the new TV show begins, the first pages of a book turn and another comic book or video game rolls out in front of you, that last breath of anticipation leaves and you find yourself immediately immersed in the new Star Wars adventure. It's at this moment you fully realize that Star Wars is not something you enjoy, it's an entire world that you love. It's a love that inspires, comforts, and challenges you. It's a love that's not always easy and sometimes requires growth or pulls it from you. It's a love, though, that always rewards you and that love of Star Wars is built upon the foundation of many great moments—these are mine that I have shared with you. Yours are even more important—but there is nothing greater than the Star Wars moments you have yet to experience. They're out there. Waiting for you in a galaxy far, far away...

## EPILOGUE

I'm often asked if I ever get tired of Star Wars. From the age of seven to this very moment, it's been one of my passions. I'm one of those fans that adorns their walls with Star Wars art and posters. I'm running out of space on my bookshelves for new books, visual dictionaries and collectibles. And long-lost relatives who haven't seen me in years know that, for a safe holiday gift, they can just give me a Star Wars key chain, and everyone will be happy. It's everywhere. I do love Star Wars.

In 2014, I started to talk about Star Wars professionally. I began to broadcast my opinions, hot takes, and share all my joy for those little moments, shared inside jokes, and trivia answers that bring us all to the saga. It grew and grew, and, at the time of this writing, I record up to six hours of Star Wars programming a week for shows like *ForceCenter*, *Collider Jedi Council*, *Black Series Rebels*, and many other wonderful Star Wars podcasts. Because of that, I have to watch every movie again and again. I can't miss the television shows. Barely skip a word in the novels and regularly run over to my comic shop Earth-2 in Northridge, California, to pick up the comic books. And every trip to a store finds me sneaking over to the toy aisle to see what treasure I might find. There is not a day that goes by without some part of it spent thinking about Star Wars, even on that rare Tuesday when I want to think about something else.

You'll hear tales of the dark side of the fandom. Of the raging debates over the tiniest of details or biggest of themes. You'll hear of actors, directors, and creators being harassed and fractures in the ranks. It's there. There's no denying it, sadly. It's as if the lessons of the worldwide bullying of Star Wars Kid didn't take hold. It's as if those times growing up in which you were told your joy of this



franchise put you on the fringe weren't a powerful enough reminder to never stop celebrating it. There are days when it's a challenge to be a Star Wars fan.

Yet, when you walk onto a convention floor and feel connected with thousands of strangers over the shared appreciation of a silly space opera, that all fades away. When someone sees your tee shirt and calls across a room to find out what your favorite Star Wars movie is or when your friend uses a Han Solo quote in a normal conversation and you both laugh at the ease in which it slipped into the flow of the moment, it all feels worth it. When you look back on your life and remember the first time you connected with a character, a scene, or brief little moment that you thought only you had seen, it all feels right. Star Wars is everywhere in my life.

But I never get tired of it.

I love Star Wars.

And I hope you do too.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When you finish something that you once thought impossible, one tends to want to thank every person that they have ever crossed paths with. So, a special thank you to everyone. If your name is not listed here, then I owe you lunch. Except for Joel Trudgeon, Casey Alexander, and David Gerhard. You owe me.

I'd especially like to acknowledge my parents, Al and Debi Napzok, and my sister Katie as well as my nephew Ryu and niece LeMuria. Thank you for letting a young kid fall soul first into a space movie. The Force is strong in my family.

Thank you to Jim Dellinger and the entire Dellinger family. I was a small-town kid lost in the big city when my Uncle Jim pulled me under his protective wing. I'm still here because of that.

To Nick and Liz Napzok, thank you for always being in the front row to support me. Uncle Nick, you may have left us too early for our tastes, but I still hear your laughter and encouragement.

To my cousin Michelle and her husband Randy. Thanks for your support and those drinks in the Anaheim hotel bar that one time. After this, I hope your girls Maggie and Madeline will still think I'm as cool as I think they are.

Thanks to my friend and writing partner Matt Key. There's been a lot of times over the years I was convinced I couldn't write anything ever again. A good lunch consisting of several baskets of chips and salsa and encouraging talks with you would always inspire me to keep writing.

To my spiritual brother Paul Ventimiglia and the Ventimiglia family. Life has no safety net, but your unwavering support always feels like one. One time during a professional wrestling match, I was staring up at you seconds before you were about to jump twenty feet down onto me and realized I never felt safer. We shall finish the game, pal.

I would not be in the position to write this book if I didn't take my first steps into a larger world back in 2012 (just weeks before Disney bought Lucasfilm!). Kristian Harloff and Mark Ellis, who somehow thought this old radio DJ told enough funny jokes on stand-up stages around Los Angeles, asked me to produce their podcast *Schmoes Know Movies*. From there began a wild, unplanned journey into the media discussion world. If one person not related to me reads this book, it's because Kristian and Mark asked me to join them on an adventure all those years ago. Thanks, ya Schmoes.

Thanks to the SK crew through the years. Mark Reilly, Josh Macuga, Joe Ruggirello, Josh Tapia, Christian Ruvalcaba, Cody Hall, Robert Butler III, Andres Cabrera, Brian Perez, Max Mulderrig, Miri Jedeikin, Roxy Striar, and Tiffany Smith. Phase 3 for life.

A special thanks to Maude Garrett. In 2014, we put our Star Wars fandom on display every week as part of the show *Jedi Alliance*. It was silly, loud, jokey, nerdy, and some of the most fun I have ever had being a fan. I will always be happy that I first talked about Star Wars professionally while at your side. Star Pause!

I can't say enough about Joseph Scrimshaw and Jennifer Landa. We began working on the *ForceCenter* podcast in 2015 and not a week has gone by without the two of you teaching me something about Star Wars. Whether it's different perspectives, deeper themes, or the absolute joy of Ewoks or the silliness of a made-up character brawl, I fall more in love with this franchise each week because of what you both bring to the discussions. During an overwhelming and

often challenging time in the fandom, you both put the love of Star Wars first. Yub Nub.

In the summer of 2018, I had lunch with my good friend Alicia Malone, author of *Backward and in Heels* and *The Female Gaze*. I muttered to her that I wanted to write a book. Alicia believed I could and graciously said she would write her editor at Mango Publishing. Within a few days, I had begun this journey. I am forever grateful to you, Leash.

Thank you to Hugo Villabona and Robin Miller at Mango Publishing. You made this happen. Literally. Your patience and guidance made me calm while your notes made everything better. That Mango Publishing crew is pretty special.

A giant thanks to Heather Grace Hancock for your love and support every day—but especially the days I would show up at your doorstep after having just screamed to myself that I couldn't write this book. You believed in me when I no longer did. Thank you for that...and for letting Ratsy and Baxter into my life, even when they bite me or steal my wine. I love you.

And, finally, thank you to all who have created, written, performed, directed, and contributed to Star Wars. This is truly the greatest saga ever told. Which, of course, means we all have to give a special thanks to George Lucas. George, if you hadn't grabbed a pencil and pad of paper to start writing about those Adventures of Luke Starkiller over forty years ago, not one word of this book would exist and my childhood—my entire life—would have been a lot less fun. Thank you.